

BOCCACCIO'S COMMENTARY ON THE
'DIVINA COMMEDIA.'

In the summer of the year 1373 a petition was presented to the Signoria of Florence, on behalf of a number of Florentine citizens, praying that a lecturer might be appointed to expound publicly, in Florence, the Book of Dante, 'librum Dantis qui vulgariter appellatur *el Dante*'—of that same Dante who, seventy-one years before, had been ignominiously expelled from Florence, and condemned by his fellow-citizens to be burned alive, should he fall into their hands—'igne comburatur sic quod moriatur¹.'

The petition in question, a copy of which is preserved in the Florentine *Libro delle Provvisioni* for the year 1373 is to the following effect:—

'Whereas divers citizens of Florence, being minded, as well for themselves and others their fellow-citizens, as for their posterity, to follow after virtue, are desirous of being instructed in the book of Dante, wherefrom, both to the shunning of vice, and to the acquisition of virtue, no less than in the ornaments of eloquence, even the unlearned may receive instruction; the said citizens humbly pray you, the worshipful Government of the People and Commonwealth of Florence, that you be pleased, at a fitting time, to provide and formally to determine, that a worthy and learned man, well versed in the knowledge of the poem aforesaid, shall be by you elected, for such term as you may appoint, being not longer than one year, to read the book which is commonly called *el Dante*, in the city of Florence, to all such as shall be desirous of hearing him, on consecutive days, not being holidays, and in consecutive lectures, as is customary in like cases; and with such salary as you may determine, not exceeding the sum of one hundred gold florins for the said year, and in such manner, and under such conditions, as may seem proper to you; and, further, that

¹ A clause in the sentence of March 10, 1302, pronounced against Dante and others, runs:—'Si quis predictorum ullo tempore in fortiam dicti Comunis pervenerit, talis perveniens igne comburatur sic quod moriatur.'

the said salary be paid to the said lecturer from the funds of the Commonwealth, in two terminal payments, to wit, one moiety about the end of the month of December, and the other moiety about the end of the month of April, such sum to be free of all deduction for taxes whatsoever...'; and so forth¹.

On the ninth of August following, the petition was taken into consideration by the Signoria, and having been favourably reported on, the question whether it should be approved was put to the vote by ballot, the ayes being indicated by black beans, the noes by white, after the usual Florentine custom. On the votes being counted, it was found that there were 186 black beans to 19 white, being a majority of 167 in favour of the appointment of a lecturer on Dante².

The voting having been secret, the names of the voters have not

¹ Milanese, in his edition of Boccaccio's *Comento* (Vol. I. pp. i, ii), gives the text of the petition from the *Libro delle Provvisioni* as follows:—

'Pro parte quamplurium civium civitatis Florentie desiderantium tam pro se ipsis, quam pro aliis civibus aspirare desiderantibus ad virtutes, quam etiam pro eorum posteris et descendantibus, instrui in libro Dantis, ex quo tam in fuga vitiorum, quam in acquisitione virtutum, quam in ornatu eloquentie possunt etiam non grammatici informari; reverenter supplicatur vobis dominis Prioribus artium et Vexillifero Justitie populi et comunis Florentie, quatenus dignemini opportune providere et facere solempniter reformari, quod vos possitis eligere unum valentem et sapientem virum in huiusmodi poesie scientia bene doctum, pro eo tempore quo velitis, non maiore unius anni, ad legendum librum qui vulgariter appellatur *el Dante* in civitate Florentie, omnibus audire volentibus, continuatis diebus non feriat, et per continuatas lectiones, ut in similibus fieri solet; et cum eo salario quo voletis, non maiore centum florenorum auri pro anno predicto, et cum modis, formis, articulis et tenoribus, de quibus vobis videbitur convenire. Et quod camerarii Camere comunis predicti...debeant dictum salarium dicto sic electo dare et solvere de pecunia dicti Comunis in duobus terminis sive paghis, videlicet medietatem circa finem mensis decembris, et reliquam medietatem circa finem mensis aprilis, absque ulla retentione gabelle; habita dumtaxat apodixa officii dominorum Priorum; et visa electione per vos facta de aliquo ad lecturam predictam et absque aliqua alia probatione vel fide fienda de predictis vel aliquo predictorum vel solempnitate aliqua observanda.'

² The record of the deliberation and voting of the Signoria upon the petition is preserved in the *Libro delle Provvisioni*:—

'Super qua quidem petitione...dicti domini Priores et Vexillifer habita invicem et cuna cum officio gonfalonierorum Sotietatum populi et cum officio Duodecim bonorum virorum Comunis Florentie deliberatione solempni, et demum inter ipsos omnes in sufficienti numero congregatos in palatio populi Florentie, premissis et facto diligenti et secreto scrupuloso et obtento partito ad fabas nigras et albas per vigintiocto ex eis pro utilitate Comunis eiusdem...deliberaverunt die VIII mensis augusti anno dominice Incarnationis MCCCLXXXIII, indictione XI, quod dicta petitio et omnia et singula in ea contanta, admittantur,...et observentur,...secundum petitionis eiusdem continentiam et tenorem....

'Item supradicto Preposito, modo et forma predictis proponente et partitum faciente inter dictos omnes consiliarios dicti consilii in ipso consilio presentes, quod cui placet et videtur suprascriptam quartam provisionem disponentem pro eligendo unum ad legendum librum Dantis, que sic incipit: "Pro parte quamplurium civium etc."...admicti et observari...et executioni mandari posse et debere,...det fabam nigram pro *sic*; et quod cui contrarium seu aliud videretur, det fabam pro *non*. Et ipsis fabis datis, recollectis, segregatis et numeratis...et ipsorum consiliariorum voluntatibus exquisitis ad fabas nigras et albas, ut moris est, repertum fuit CLXXXVI ex ipsis consiliariis repertis dedisse fabas nigras pro *sic*. Et sic secundum formam provisionis eiusdem obtentum, firmatum et reformatum fuit, non obstantibus reliquis XVIII ex ipsis consiliariis repertis dedisse fabas albas in contrarium pro *non*.' (Milanese, *op. cit.*, Vol. I. p. ii.)

been preserved, otherwise it might have been interesting to note to what families the dissentient minority of nineteen belonged. It is easy to conceive that the members of certain Florentine houses, whose forbears Dante has placed in Hell, or otherwise branded in the *Divina Commedia*, might be disinclined to vote for a proposal, which would make it admissible for the poet's scathing remarks to be repeated publicly, and perhaps commented on, before friends and foes, by an official lecturer in their own city. Members of the Adimari family, for instance, who had been Dante's near neighbours, and were his implacable enemies, could hardly be expected to relish the reference to their low origin in the *Paradiso*, and the denunciation of their house as

L' oltracotata schiatta, che s' indraca
Retro a chi fugge, ed a chi mostra il dente,
O ver la borsa, com' agnel si placa—

'the insolent brood, who are as fierce as dragons to those who fly from them, but to those who show their teeth, or their purse, are as mild as lambs' (*Par.* XVI. 115–117); nor would they care to have their fellow-citizens reminded that one of their clan (Filippo Argenti) Dante could exclaim

Bontà non è che sua memoria fregi—
(*Inf.* VIII. 47);

and that another (Tegghiaio Aldobrandi) was consigned by the poet to the most disreputable circle of Hell, 'tra le anime più nere' (*Inf.* VI. 85; XVI. 41). For similar reasons we should be prepared to find among the opponents of the petition descendants of the Abati, of the Cerchi, of the Soldanieri, of the Chiaramontesi, of the Donati, and many others, whose memories are held up to execration in the *Commedia*, as enemies of their country, or as thieves and swindlers.

Within three weeks of the approval of the petition by the Signoria a lecturer was appointed in the person of 'Dominus Johannes de Certaldo, honorabilis civis florentinus.' The actual record of Boccaccio's appointment has not been preserved, the leaf of the *Libro delle Provisioni* for the year 1373, containing the entry, having unfortunately been torn out at a comparatively recent date¹. It was still intact in 1604, as appears from a statement by Filippo Valori in his *Termini di mezzo Rilievo e d' intera Dottrina* printed in that year², in which he says:—

'Il qual Boccaccio, oltre al dirsi Maestro dell' Eloquenza, fu stimato di tal dottrina, che e' potesse dichiarare quella di Dante, e perciò, l' anno

¹ See Milanese, *op. cit.*, Vol. I. p. iii.

² See Gamba, *Serie dei Testi di Lingua*, quarta ed., p. 554, col. a, No. 2006.

mille trecento settanta tre, lo elesse la Città per Lettor pubblico, con salario di cento fiorini, che fu notabile; e vedesi questo nel Libro delle Provvisioni¹.’

The information, however, is supplied by another document, in the *Libro dell' Uscita della Camera*, preserved in the *Archivio di Stato di Firenze*, which records the payment to Boccaccio on December 31, 1373, of fifty gold florins, being the first instalment of his salary as lecturer on Dante. In this document it is stated in so many words that Boccaccio had been elected to the office on the twenty-fifth of the previous August, for the term of one year, at a salary of one hundred gold florins, which year commenced on the 18th of October following².

Boccaccio gave his first lecture on Sunday, the twenty-third of October³, 1373, as we know from an entry in the diary of his fellow-citizen, Guido Monaldi, who, among the notable events of the year, records:—‘Domenica a dì ventitrè di Ottobre cominciò in Firenze a leggere il Dante M. Giovanni Boccaccio.’

The place where Boccaccio delivered his lectures is stated by Gaetano Milanesi, in the preface to his edition of the *Comento* (no doubt on the authority of Tiraboschi⁴), to have been the Church of ‘Santo Stefano al Ponte Vecchio,’ that is, the Church of Santo Stefano and Santa Cecilia, close to the Via Por Santa Maria. Milanesi, however, whose statement has been frequently repeated by subsequent writers⁵, is in error on this point. We have the evidence of one who himself

¹ See Manni, *Istoria del Decamerone*, p. 101.

² The text of the original document is given by Milanesi (*op. cit.*, p. iii) as follows:—
‘1378, 31 decembris.

‘Domino Johanni de Certaldo honorabili civi florentino electo per dominos Priores Artium et Vexilliferum Justitie dicti populi et Comunis, die xxv mensis augusti proxime preteriti ad legendum librum qui vulgariter appellatur *il Dante*, in civitate Florentie, pro tempore et termino unius anni incepti die decimo ottavo mensis ottubris proxime preteriti et cum salario centum florenorum auri pro anno quolibet, solvendum secundum formam reformationis consilii dicti populi et Comunis de hac materia loquentis, pro ipsius domini Johannis salario et paga primorum sex mensium dicti temporis, initialis die decimo ottavo mensis ottubris proxime preteriti, pro dimidio totius dicti salarii, vigore electionis de eo facte, in summa florenorum quinquaginta auri.’

³ Manni (*op. cit.*, p. 100), Tiraboschi (Vol. v. p. 744, ed. 1823), and Columb de Batines (*Bibl. Dant.*, p. 646), following a corrupt text of Monaldi's *Diario*, give the date of Boccaccio's first lecture as October 3, instead of October 23. That the former date cannot be correct is proved by the statement in the document quoted above (note 2) that Boccaccio's year of office began on October 18, so that his lectures must have commenced after that date. Moreover, Monaldi records that Boccaccio began lecturing on a Sunday, whereas October 3, 1373, was a Monday. The correct date is given in the Prato (1835) edition of the *Diario*.

⁴ Vol. v. p. 744, ed. 1823.

⁵ For instance, by Landau in his *Giovanni Boccaccio, sein Leben und seine Werke* (p. 233); by Cochin in his *Études Italiennes* (p. 167); and by Baedeker in his *Northern Italy* (ed. 1895, p. 417). Gardner, on the other hand, in *The Story of Florence* correctly states (pp. 212, 346) that Boccaccio lectured in the Church of the Badia.

attended the lectures, to prove that Boccaccio delivered them, not in the Church of Santo Stefano near the Ponte Vecchio, but in a still more ancient church, next in antiquity to the Baptistery itself, namely the Church of the Badia, which was also dedicated to Saint Stephen¹. Benvenuto da Imola, who, as I have pointed out elsewhere², took pride in describing himself as a pupil of Boccaccio, in his comment on Dante's reference to the chimes of the Badia, in the fifteenth canto of the *Paradiso*³, observes:—

'In the inner circle of Florence is the abbey of the Benedictine monks, whose church is called Santo Stefano; where the chimes used to tell the hour more regularly than in any other church in the city. At the present time, however, it is sadly neglected and out of repair, as I noticed while I was attending the lectures of my revered master, Boccaccio of Certaldo, upon the *Divina Commedia*, which he delivered in this same church⁴.'

Though Boccaccio was not more than sixty, he was an old man of his years, and infirm in health, when he began his lectures; and he can hardly have hoped to carry to a close this last great undertaking of a busy life. In fact, he did not live to complete more than a sixth part of his arduous task, his commentary breaking off abruptly at the seventeenth verse of the seventeenth canto of the *Inferno*. In the winter of 1373 he was attacked by a painful disease, pronounced by modern medical opinion to be diabetes⁵, which gradually weakened him and ultimately proved fatal. He was also greatly shaken by the news, which reached him at Certaldo in the following autumn, of the death of his old friend and master Petrarch, who had died of apoplexy at Arquà on the eighteenth of the previous July⁶. In a letter written,

1 Later this church was dedicated to Santa Maria, whence it is now entitled 'Santa Maria in Santo Stefano.' See Repetti, *Compendio Storico della Città di Firenze*, pp. 309, 350.

2 See the article on *Benvenuto da Imola and his Commentary on the Divina Commedia* in my *Dante Studies and Researches* (pp. 218, 232 ff.).

3 Lines 97–8.

4 'In interiori circulo est Abbatia monachorum sacti Benedicti, cuius ecclesia dicitur Sanctus Stephanus, ubi certius et ordinatius pulsabantur horae quam in aliqua alia ecclesia civitatis; quae tamen hodie est in ordinata et neglecta, ut vidi, dum audirem venerabilem praeceptorem meum Boccacium de Certaldo legentem istum nobilem poetam in dicta ecclesia' (*Benvenuti de Rambaldi de Imola Comentum super Dantis Aldigherii Comoediam, Nunc primum integre in lucem editum, Sumptibus Guilielmi Warren Vernon, curante Jacobo Philippo Lacaita*. Vol. v. p. 145).

5 See Cochin, *Études Italiannes: Boccace*, p. 167, n. 1.

6 Monaldi, in his *Diario*, gives August 18 as the date of Petrarch's death: 'Venerdì a dì 18 d' Agosto morì M. Francesco Petrarca il gran Poeta ad Arquata presso Padova del male di gocciola.' This is certainly a mistake, as the news is mentioned in a letter of Coluccio Salutati to Benvenuto da Imola, which was written from Florence on the 25th of July, less than a week after the event. (See *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, ed. Novati, Vol. I. p. 172.) It is somewhat strange that Boccaccio should not have heard

at the beginning of November, to Francescuolo da Brossano, Petrarch's son-in-law, on the receipt of the news, Boccaccio gives the following melancholy account of his own condition:—

'I was anxious to come to you at once, my dear brother, to mingle my tears with yours over our common loss, and at your side to breathe my laments to heaven, and say a last farewell over the tomb of our beloved father. But I must tell you that ten months ago, while I was lecturing in Florence on the *Commedia* of Dante, I was seized with illness, not so much of a dangerous nature, as long and wearisome. For four months past, at the entreaty of my friends, I have been in the hands, I will not say of physicians, but of quacks, who have not only increased my malady, but by doses and starvation have so upset my digestive organs, that I am reduced to a state of weakness hardly to be credited by any one who has not experienced it—my looks, however, tell their own tale to every one who sets eyes on me.

'Poor wretch that I am, you would find me sadly changed from what I was when you saw me in Venice! the skin of my body, once plump enough, is all shriveled up, my colour has gone, my eyes are dim, and my hands tremble, while my knees are so unsteady, that so far from attempting to cross the Apennines, I could only just drag myself out of Florence with the help of friends to my farm here at Certaldo, where I remain, more dead than alive, torn with anxiety, and wasting away in idleness, not knowing what to do with myself, my sole hope of a cure being in the grace of God, who is able to overcome all diseases¹.'

After referring to Petrarch's burying-place at Arquà, and to his books, and to Petrarch's legacy to himself of fifty gold florins for the

of Petrarch's death until three months after it was known in Florence. It is evident from the tone of his reply to Francescuolo da Brossano, that the announcement of the latter was the first intimation he received of it.

¹ The original, which is printed by Corazzini in *Le lettere Edite e Inedite di Messer Giovanni Boccaccio* (pp. 377 foll.), runs as follows:—

'Cum cuncta persolverem, amatissime frater, fuit animus venire illico daturus infortunio tuo meoque debitas lachrymas, tecumque in coelum ac superos questus meos, et ultimum penes bustum tanti patris vale dicturus. Verum jam decimus elapsus est mensis, postquam in patria publice legentem Comoediam Dantis magis longa, atque taediosa, quam discrimine aliquo dubia aegritudo oppressit, et dum per quatuor menses non dicam mediocrum, sed fabulonum, amicorum impulsu consilia sequor, continue aucta est, et potionibus et jejuniis adeo a solito ordine exorbitare coacta est nutritiva virtus, ut in debilitatem devenerim fere inexperto incredibilem, cui satis fidem praestat aspectus meus videntibus. Heu mihi misero! Longe aliter tibi viderer, quam is, quem vidisti Venetiis. Exhausta totius pleni quondam corporis pellis est, immutatus color, hebetatus visus, titubant genua, et manus tremulae factae sunt, ex quo nedum superbos Apennini vertices, sed vix usque in avitum Certaldi agrum, amicorum quorundam suffragio, deductus a patria sum, ubi semivivus et anxius, ocio marcens, et mei ipsius incertus consisto, Dei solius, qui febribus imperare potest, medelam expectans et gratiam.'

purchase of a dressing-gown to keep him warm while at his studies on winter nights¹, Boccaccio concludes:—

‘I am too ill to write more....Even this short letter has taken me nearly three whole days to write, save for occasional intervals of an hour or two for the repose of my exhausted frame².’

It seems probable, from what Boccaccio says in this mournful epistle, that he never resumed his lectures after the attack of illness to which he refers. How much of the fragment of commentary he has left was actually delivered as lectures it is impossible to say. That the matter was carefully prepared beforehand is obvious from the elaborate nature of the divisions, and from several other indications to which we shall recur later. It is not unreasonable to suppose that, though too ill to lecture publicly, Boccaccio may have occupied himself at Certaldo in continuing the commentary, in the hope of eventually resuming his course at Florence. But his end was not far off, and he died at Certaldo—it would almost seem pen in hand, for his last sentence is left unfinished—on December the twenty-first, 1375, rather more than a year after the above letter was written, having survived Petrarch, who was nine years his senior, by only eighteen months³.

It was at one time supposed that Boccaccio, far from leaving a mere fragment, had written a complete commentary on the whole of the *Divina Commedia*; and a fourteenth century *Comento*⁴, which in some MSS. is attributed to him, was accepted as his composition by the Academicians of the Crusca in the first edition (1612) of their *Vocabolario*, as well as in the two subsequent editions (1623 and 1691)⁵, and also by several scholars in the eighteenth century, among whom was Mazzucchelli. It has been proved, however, by internal evidence, that this commentary cannot have been written by Boccaccio⁶; and, further, we have documentary evidence to prove that Boccaccio left no more than the fragment which has come down to us. It so happens that

¹ Petrarch's will is printed by Fracassetti in his *Francisci Petrarcae Epistolae De Rebus Familiaribus* (Vol. III. pp. 537 ff.). The bequest to Boccaccio runs as follows:—

‘Johanni de Certaldo seu Boccatio, verecunde admodum tanto viro tam modicum, lego quinquaginta florenos auri de Florentia pro una veste hiemali ad stadium lucubrationesque nocturnas.’

² ‘Tres fere dies totos, paucis interpositis horis ad restaurandas parumper fessi corporis vires, in scribendo hanc brevem epistolam consumpsi.’

³ The date of Boccaccio's death is given by Coluccio Salutati in his letter from Florence to Francescuolo da Brossano, written three days after the event. (See *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, ed. Novati, Vol. I. p. 225.)

⁴ This commentary, which is commonly known as *Il Falso Boccaccio*, was printed by Lord Vernon at Florence in 1846, under the title *Chiose sopra Dante*.

⁵ See the *Lezione* of Luigi Rigoli prefixed to Lord Vernon's edition (pp. 12–14).

⁶ See the *Lezione* of Luigi Rigoli already referred to.

after Boccaccio's death a dispute arose between two of his legatees as to the possession of the MS. of his *Comento*. By his will Boccaccio left the whole of his disposable property, with the exception of his library and a few specific bequests, to the children of his brother Jacopo Boccaccio, who was appointed one of the executors of the will. His library Boccaccio left to his confessor, Fra Martino da Signa, an Augustinian monk of the convent of Santo Spirito in Florence, on condition that after Fra Martino's death the books should become the property of the convent, to be there preserved in perpetuity for the use of the community¹. When Boccaccio died, Fra Martino claimed the MS. of the *Comento* as part of the library. Jacopo, on the other hand, claimed it, on behalf of his children, as part and parcel of his brother's bequest to them. As the disputants could not come to an agreement, the matter was referred to the Consoli dell' Arte del Cambio, to whom the claims of the two parties were submitted in writing. Fra Marino, it appears, was willing, if the decision was in his favour, to allow Jacopo to have the MS., a sheet at a time, for the purpose of taking a copy of it, on the understanding that if the decision was in Jacopo's favour, the like facility should be granted to himself. This offer, however, appears to have been ignored by Jacopo, who claimed the MS. outright. In the particulars of Jacopo's claim is set down a detailed description of the MS. in question, which he valued at the lowest at eighteen gold florins. In this description it is stated in the clearest possible terms that the commentary was left incomplete by Boccaccio, and only comprised sixteen cantos of the *Commedia* and part of the seventeenth.

'Dinanzi a voi domando,' runs Jacopo's claim, 'ventiquattro quaderni, e quattordici quadernucci, tutti in carta di bambagia, non legati insieme, ma l' uno dall' altro diviso, d' uno iscritto, o vero isposizione sopra sedici Capitoli, e parte del diciassettesimo del Dante, il quale scritto il detto Messer Giovanni di Boccaccio non compie...'

In the event, though that does not concern us here, it was adjudged

¹ Boccaccio's will is printed by Corazzini (*op. cit.*, pp. 425 ff.). The bequest of his library is in the following terms:—

'Item reliquit venerabili fratri Martino de Signa, Magistro in sacra theologia, conventus Sancti Spiritus Ordinis heremitarum Sancti Augustini, omnes suos libros, excepto Breviario dicti testatoris, cum ista conditione, quod dictus Magister Martinus possit uti dictis libris, et de eis exhibere copiam cui voluerit, donec vixerit, ad hoc ut ipse teneatur rogare Deum pro anima dicti testatoris, et tempore suae mortis debeat consignare dictos libros conventui fratrum Sancti Spiritus, sine aliqua diminutione, et debeant micti in quodam armario dicti loci et ibidem debeant perpetuo remanere ad hoc ut quilibet de dicto conventu possit legere et studere super dictis libris, et ibi scribi facere modum et formam presentis testamenti et facere inventarium de dictis libris.'

by the Consoli that the MS. should be handed over to Jacopo and his co-executors, as forming part of Boccaccio's bequest to his brother's children¹. Although, as we have seen, the fact that Boccaccio's commentary was incomplete, was unknown to the Academicians of the Crusca at the beginning of the seventeenth century²; yet this fact had been publicly remarked upon by Giovan Batista Gelli, in one of his lectures before the Florentine Academy, fifty years before. The learned Florentine hosier, who was well acquainted with Boccaccio's *Comento*, and utilized it in his own *Lecture sopra la Commedia di Dante*, says, after quoting Boccaccio's note upon *Inferno* XVI. 73–75: 'E questo dice il Boccaccio; il quale non si truova, per essersi interposta a tal cosa la morte, che sia passato con la esposizione sua questo luogo³.' And even before this the fact had been stated by Giuseppe Betussi in the life of Boccaccio prefixed to his translation of the *De Genealogia Deorum*, which was first published in 1547. After giving a list of Boccaccio's works in the vulgar tongue, he adds: 'incominciò a commentare Latinamente la comedia di Dante, cioè una parte dell' *Inferno*⁴—which means, not as might appear at first sight, that Boccaccio wrote his commentary in Latin, but that he wrote it in plain language, that it was, in fact, of a popular character.

By the commentators who followed after Boccaccio his *Comento* was largely, one might almost say in some cases shamelessly, exploited. The Anonimo Fiorentino, for instance, whose commentary was probably written about thirty years after Boccaccio's death⁵, borrowed wholesale from it, without once so much as mentioning Boccaccio's name. So far, indeed, was he from acknowledging his indebtedness, that in one case he actually indicates a false source for the information he has conveyed from Boccaccio⁶. Some idea of the nature of the Anonimo's borrowings may be gathered from the fact that the first three or four pages of the introductory portion of his commentary are almost entirely made up of

¹ The documents related to this dispute are printed by Manni (*op. cit.*, pp. 104–06).

² See above, p. 103.

³ *Lettura Settima* (1561), *Lezione Seconda*; ed. Neuroni, Vol. II. p. 112. Also in his *Lettura Prima* (1553), *Lezione Prima* (Vol. I. p. 24), he says, 'Commentò il Boccaccio alcuni capitoli della prima cantica.'

⁴ *Geneologia de gli Dei...di M. Giovanni Boccaccio...tradotti et adornati per Messer Giuseppe Betussi da Bassano. Aggiuntavi la Vita del Boccaccio*. In Vinegia, MDXLVII.

⁵ The ms. from which Fanfani printed his edition of the commentary (Bologna, 1866–74, 3 vols.) professes to have been written in 1343, that is, thirty years before Boccaccio began his lectures in Florence. This date, which appears to have been added by a later hand, is obviously incorrect. The commentary is now usually assigned to the end of the fourteenth century or the beginning of the fifteenth. See Hegel, *Über den historischen Wert der älteren Dante-Commentare*, p. 59.

⁶ See below, p. 106; and Hegel, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

excerpts from Boccaccio¹; while the opening paragraph of the commentary proper is copied word for word from that of Boccaccio². To give a detailed list of the passages thus appropriated would be beyond the scope of the present paper, but it may be of interest to draw attention to a few of the most noteworthy of them. The identification of Beatrice with the daughter of Folco Portinari and wife of Simone de' Bardi³; the allegory of the three ladies in the second canto⁴; the account of Celestine V⁵; the story of Paolo and Francesca⁶; the story of the lost cantos of the *Commedia*, which is told à propos of the opening words, 'Io dico seguitando,' of the eighth canto of the *Inferno*⁷; the accounts of the Furies⁸, of the Fates⁹, of the valley of Jehoshaphat¹⁰, of the infernal rivers¹¹, and so on;—all these are conveyed, without acknowledgement, from the *Comento* of Boccaccio, as are a large number of the etymologies given by the Anonimo¹². For his account of the origin of the Guelfs and Ghibellines the Anonimo refers to 'certe cronache tedesche,' which is a mere blind, inasmuch as the whole of it is taken direct from Boccaccio¹³.

Benvenuto da Imola, who, as has already been mentioned, attended some of Boccaccio's lectures on the *Commedia*, and the first draft of whose commentary was completed in 1373¹⁴, the year in which Boccaccio began his course, does not make so much use as might have been expected of the *Comento* of his 'venerabilis praeceptor.' He frequently quotes Boccaccio as his authority, but this is for the most part for

¹ Anon. Fior. I. 6–9: Bocc. I. 102, 97, 98, 92, 98–101, 84.

² Anon. Fior. I. 12: Bocc. I. 104.

³ Anon. Fior. I. 42: Bocc. I. 224.

⁴ Anon. Fior. I. 44: Bocc. I. 247.

⁵ Anon. Fior. I. 69: Bocc. I. 265 ff.

⁶ Anon. Fior. I. 155: Bocc. I. 476 ff.

⁷ Anon. Fior. I. 204 ff.: Bocc. II. 130 ff.

⁸ Anon. Fior. I. 220 ff.: Bocc. I. 195 ff.

⁹ Anon. Fior. I. 232 ff.: Bocc. II. 177.

¹⁰ Anon. Fior. I. 243–4: Bocc. II. 214.

¹¹ Anon. Fior. I. 339–40: Bocc. II. 400.

¹² The following may be quoted as instances, viz. *patriarca* (I. 101); *amazone* (I. 114); *Achille* (I. 152); *lugere, plorare, ululare*, &c. (I. 207–08); *Atropos* (I. 232); *arca, monimentum, sepulchrum*, &c. (I. 235); *calle* (I. 243); *cimitero* (I. 244); *arpia* (I. 316–17); *sentiero* (I. 318); *rigagno* (I. 347); &c. &c.

¹³ Anon. Fior. I. 247 ff.: Bocc. II. 225 ff. (see above, p. 105). Other passages in which the Anonimo has borrowed from Boccaccio (some of which are noted by Hagel, *op. cit.*) are the accounts of Achilles (Anon. Fior. I. 152: Bocc. I. 467–8); of the various kinds of tombs (A. F. I. 235 ff.: Bocc. II. 188–9); of Pier delle Vigne (A. F. I. 323: Bocc. II. 335); of Brunetto Latino (A. F. I. 354: Bocc. II. 406); of Priscian (A. F. I. 361: Bocc. II. 420); of Gualdrada (in part) (A. F. I. 373–4: Bocc. II. 435); of Forlì (A. F. I. 378: Bocc. II. 450); of San Benedetto in Alpe (A. F. I. 378: Bocc. II. 451); and the notes, among others, on *note* (A. F. I. 379: Bocc. II. 453); and on the diver (A. F. I. 379–80: Bocc. II. 454); &c., &c.

¹⁴ See my *Dante Studies and Researches*, p. 221.

information received from him by word of mouth¹. Benvenuto was, however, certainly indebted to the *Comento* for some of his material—for his quotations from Tacitus², for instance, as well as for certain of his references to Homer³, and to Pronapides⁴. He mentions Boccaccio's tirade against the gluttony of the Florentines, which occurs in the comment on the sixth canto of the *Inferno*⁵; and he reproduces, without acknowledgement, Boccaccio's account of the recovery of the lost cantos of the *Commedia*, already referred to⁶; and also his story of Guadrada de' Ravignani and the Emperor Otto IV⁷.

Francesco da Buti, who lectured on the *Divina Commedia* at Pisa⁸ about the year 1385, was acquainted with, and made use of, Boccaccio's *Comento*. He refers to it as his authority on three occasions⁹, but these by no means represent the whole extent of his indebtedness. Buti's commentary, to which he himself gave the title of *Lettura*, as having originally been composed in the form of lectures, was revised and prepared for publication at the instance of certain of his friends and admirers, as he tells us in his *Proemio*¹⁰. It was finally completed in 1395, just twenty years after Boccaccio's death¹¹. Like the Anonimo Fiorentino, Buti has borrowed very freely from Boccaccio in his introductory chapter, five or six pages of which are conveyed direct from his predecessor's *Comento*¹², including a formal recantation beforehand of any unorthodox or unacceptable opinions which might happen to have escaped him in the course of his lectures¹³. A considerable portion of Buti's commentary on the first canto of the *Inferno* is also taken from Boccaccio¹⁴, as are to some extent his accounts of the nine Muses¹⁵, of

¹ See my *Index of Authors quoted by Benvenuto da Imola in his Commentary on the Divina Commedia* (printed in *Report XIX of the Cambridge, U.S.A., Dante Society*), s. v. *Boccaccius*; also *Dante Studies and Researches*, pp. 232 ff., and p. 215, n. 4.

² See *Index of Authors quoted by Benvenuto*, s. v. *Tacitus*.

³ See *Index of Authors quoted by Benvenuto*, s. v. *Homerus*; and *Dante Studies and Researches*, p. 214, n. 2.

⁴ See *Index of Authors quoted by Benvenuto*, s. v. *Pronapides*.

⁵ Benv. I. 227: Bocc. II. 32 ff.

⁶ Benv. I. 273–4: Bocc. II. 131.

⁷ Benv. I. 538: Bocc. II. 435–6; Boccaccio tells this story (which he also includes in his *De Mulieribus Claris*, Cap. CI.) on the authority of Coppo di Borghese Domenichi. It is given by Villani, with some difference of detail, in his *Cronica*, v. 37.

⁸ Pisa, following the example of Florence and Bologna, was the third city in Italy to institute public lectures on the *Divina Commedia*.

⁹ *Comento di Francesco da Buti sopra la Divina Comedia* (Pisa, 1858–62), Vol. I. pp. 7, 357, 367.

¹⁰ Vol. I. pp. 4–5.

¹¹ See the colophon, Vol. III. p. 871. A passage in the commentary on Canto VI of the *Paradiso* was written in 1393; see Vol. III. p. 163.

¹² Buti, I. 5–11: Bocc. I. 81–83, 86–91.

¹³ Buti, I. 11: Bocc. I. 91.

¹⁴ Buti, I. 14–15, 22–3, 27–8, 30, 32–3, 34, 38: Bocc. I. 154, 104–109, 112–14, 117.

¹⁵ Buti, I. 59–60: Bocc. I. 205–7.

Pier delle Vigne¹, of the statue of Mars at Florence², of Chiarentana³, the ‘giubetto⁴,’ and so forth⁵. It is noteworthy that Buti does not repeat Boccaccio’s story of the lost cantos, which is reproduced both by Benvenuto da Imola and by the Anonimo Fiorentino.

Of the fifteenth century commentators only one, namely Landino, seems to have had any acquaintance with Boccaccio’s *Comento*. Giovanni da Serravalle (1416–1417) avowedly for the most part copies Benvenuto da Imola, as does Stefano Talice da Ricaldone (c. 1474); while Guiniforto delli Bargigi (c. 1440) chiefly follows the Pisan Buti.

Landino’s commentary, which is the classical commentary of the Renaissance, and has been reprinted more often probably than any other, was first published in 1481, in the famous first Florentine edition of the *Divina Commedia*, with the designs of Sandro Botticelli⁶. Landino made considerable use of the *Comento* of Boccaccio, whom he describes as ‘huomo, et per dottrina, et per costume, et per essere propinquo a’ tempi di Dante, degno di fede⁷.’ He quotes the *Comento* directly by name eight times⁸, and avails himself of it, without naming it, on numerous other occasions, chiefly for the explanation of contemporary and historical allusions. For instance, his notes on Ciacco, Filippo Argenti, Farinata degli Uberti, the Emperor Frederick II, ‘il Cardinale,’ Azzolino, Pier delle Vigne, Gualdrada, Guidoguerra, Jacopo Rusticucci, Guglielmo Borsiere, are all reproduced more or less closely from Boccaccio⁹; to whom he was also indebted for much of his classical information, as in his accounts of Phlegyas, Medusa, Minos, the Minotaur, the Centaurs, etc.¹⁰

Alessandro Vellutello of Lucca, the first of the sixteenth century commentators, whose ‘nova espositione’ was first published at Venice in 1544, does not appear to have made any use whatever of Boccaccio’s *Comento*. As is well known, he poured contempt on Boccaccio’s *Vita*

¹ Buti, I. 357: Bocc. II. 335.

² Buti, I. 367: Bocc. II. 352–3.

³ Buti, I. 404: Bocc. II. 404.

⁴ Buti, I. 367: Bocc. II. 357.

⁵ Cf. also Buti, I. 60: Bocc. I. 209; Buti, I. 106: Bocc. I. 277–8; Buti, I. 140: Bocc. I. 402.

⁶ A copy of this edition, with the full complement (nineteen) of Botticelli’s designs of the *Inferno*, was sold at the Carmichael sale at Sotheby’s (No. 270) on March 24, 1903, for £1000.

⁷ Venice edition of 1578, fol. 48.

⁸ Ed. 1578, foll. 38, 48 (three times), 50, 78, 85¹, 90.

⁹ Ed. 1578, foll. 38, 50, 63, 63¹–4, 72¹, 75¹, 88¹, 89.

¹⁰ Ed. 1578, foll. 49, 55¹, 69, 71, &c. Other passages in which Landino has utilized Boccaccio are the comments on the statue of Mars, and Attila (foll. 77¹), Chiarentana, Brunetto Latino (fol. 84), Priscian, Francesco d’ Accorso (fol. 86¹), Monte Veso (fol. 89¹), and San Benedetto (fol. 90). The note on *lonza* (fol. 4), which ostensibly is from Boccaccio’s *Comento*, in reality comes from Benvenuto da Imola (I. 35), to whom it was communicated by Boccaccio.

di Dante, as a mere romance ‘tutta piena d’ amorosi sospiri e lagrime¹,’ and it is quite possible that he had an equally low opinion of the lectures on the *Commedia*.

Bernardo Daniello, likewise of Lucca, whose commentary was published posthumously at Venice in 1568, seems, like Vellutello, to have ignored Boccaccio altogether so far as his *Comento* is concerned².

The Florentine Gelli³, on the other hand, who lectured on the *Divina Commedia* before the Florentine Academy at various times between 1541 and 1561, quotes Boccaccio’s *Comento* in his *Lecture*⁴ more than sixty times—oftener than he quotes any other commentator, except Landino⁵. Unlike his predecessors Gelli makes a point of always naming his authority. He introduces his quotations usually by some such formula as ‘secondo che scrive il Boccaccio,’ or ‘il Boccaccio dice,’ or ‘così espone il Boccaccio.’ Frequently he gives long extracts in Boccaccio’s own words, ‘le parole sue proprie⁶.’ Although as a rule he quotes the *Comento* at first hand, on one occasion at least (for the story of the lost cantos) he takes his account at second hand from Landino⁷. He does not always accept Boccaccio’s conclusions⁸; but, on the other hand, he more than once declares that Boccaccio has explained a particular passage so well that he cannot do better than repeat what he has said:—‘Non saprei io per me trovarci miglior esposizione che

¹ See the opening sentence of the *Vita e Costumi del Poeta*, prefixed to Vellutello’s commentary.

² Daniello frequently quotes the *Decameron* and other works of Boccaccio; see, for instance, pp. 2, 5, 23, 41, 43, 49, 56, 110, 427, &c. &c. The fact that Boccaccio’s *Comento* had not yet been printed may perhaps help to account for its being ignored by Vellutello and Daniello. Gelli says (*Lettura Seconda, Lezione Decima*, Vol. I. p. 295, ed. Negroni) that Vellutello follows Boccaccio in his interpretation of *Inferno* IV. 69, but there is nothing to show that he is following Boccaccio any more than one of the other commentators who give the same explanation. Cf. also Gelli, *Lettura Quinta, Lezione Sesta*, Vol. I. p. 653, ed. Negroni.

³ Gelli is best known perhaps as the author of *I Capricci del Bottai*, which was translated into English by William Barker in 1568, under the title of *The Fearful Fancies of the Florentine Couper*.

⁴ In his various *Lecture* (twelve in all) Gelli commented on *Inferno* I–XXV, and on portions of *Inferno* XXVI, *Purgatorio* XVI, XXVII, and *Paradiso* XXVI.

⁵ That is to say so far as the first sixteen cantos of the *Inferno* are concerned, on which alone Boccaccio commented. Landino is quoted altogether about ninety times, Benvenuto da Imola about seventy, Vellutello about thirty, Pietro di Dante about twenty-five, Buti about a dozen, the *Ottimo Comento*, and Jacopo della Lana, six each.

⁶ Gelli, I. 329; Bocc. I. 444; Gelli, I. 672; Bocc. II. 260; other instances of verbatim quotations are Gelli, I. 544; Bocc. II. 163; Gelli, I. 610–11; Bocc. II. 224; Gelli, I. 634; Bocc. II. 245; Gelli, I. 653; Bocc. II. 252–3; Gelli, II. 6; Bocc. II. 272; Gelli, II. 41; Bocc. II. 319; in this last passage Gelli’s editor, Negroni, has attributed to Boccaccio a sentence which belongs to Gelli—the quotation marks should end at ‘le mosche,’ not at ‘tale ufizio.’

⁷ Gelli, I. 471.

⁸ See, for instance, I. 113, 382, 543, 609; II. 68–9.

quella del Boccaccio' (I. 295); again—'Conoscendo di non poter far tal cosa meglio che si facesse in questo luogo il Boccaccio, vi reciterò le parole sue proprie' (I. 329).

Gelli, in fact, was the first to appreciate the *Comento* at its true value. He realized that Boccaccio was in a position to know accurately the history of many of the people and incidents referred to by Dante¹; and he recognized especially the importance of his interpretations of antiquated and obscure words and phrases². But at the same time he was critic enough to perceive that Boccaccio's information was not always to be accepted without examination. He distrusts, for instance, his explanation of the tides³; while of his account of the origin of the Guelfs and Ghibellines he says roundly 'non può esser in modo alcuno vera⁴.'

Considering the high reputation which Boccaccio's *Comento* enjoyed from the very first, down to the middle of the sixteenth century (as is evidenced by the manner in which, as we have seen, it was utilized successively by Benvenuto da Imola, Francesco da Buti, the Anonimo Fiorentino, Landino, and Gelli), it is somewhat remarkable that there should be only four MSS. of it in existence. Of Boccaccio's own MS., as far as the beginning of the commentary on the fifth canto, having disappeared⁶.

It is also remarkable, and not altogether to the credit of the Florentines, that the lectures in which their forefathers showed such keen interest should have been left unpublished for more than two centuries and a half after the invention of printing. Only four editions of the *Comento* have been printed. The *editio princeps* was issued at Naples (with the false imprint of Florence) in 1742, in two volumes 8vo., which form the fifth and sixth volumes of the collection of *Opere Volgari*

¹ See, for instance, I. 383.

² For example, *adonare* (Gelli, I. 379); *agognare* (I. 376); *a pruovo* (II. 17); *brolo* (II. 105); *bufera* (I. 329); *gentile* (I. 349); *lai* (I. 334); *putto* (II. 34); *rabbuffare* (I. 423); *roste* (II. 41); *stipa* (I. 634); *strozza* (I. 466); *tenzonare* (I. 532).

³ Gelli, II. 68–9.

⁴ Gelli, I. 609.

⁵ See above, p. 104.

⁶ See Milanesi's edition of the *Comento*, Vol. I. p. v.

in *Prosa del Boccaccio* published by Lorenzo Ciccarelli¹. This edition, which was printed from a single (and, as it was then thought, unique) MS., in spite of its once high reputation, is of very little critical value, owing to the serious errors of transcription and of the press with which it abounds². At the end of the second volume are appended the *Annotazioni* of Anton Maria Salvini, to whose exertions it was largely due that the *Comento* was at last printed with Boccaccio's other works.

More than a hundred years later, in 1831–2, a second edition, based upon the same single MS., was published at Florence, by Ignazio Moutier, in three volumes 8vo., which form volumes X–XII of his collected edition of the *Opere Volgari di Giovanni Boccaccio*. Moutier claims to have corrected several hundreds of errors and omissions in the text of the *editio princeps*³, but his own, though undoubtedly a great advance upon that of his predecessor, is still far from being perfect, chiefly owing to the fact that the single MS. upon which he had to rely is itself not by any means free from errors⁴.

In 1844 Fraticelli published an edition at Florence—the third—in three diminutive volumes in a popular series. The text of this edition has no independent value whatever, being avowedly no more than a cheap reprint of that of Moutier.

About twenty years later the first attempt at anything like a critical text was made by Gaetano Milanesi, whose edition in two volumes was published at Florence by Le Monnier in 1863. Milanesi had the advantage over previous editors in that three more MSS. of the *Comento* had been discovered since their editions were published. By the aid of these MSS. he was enabled to produce a greatly improved text, but, as he himself admits in his *Avvertimento*, there are still many passages in which the reading is obviously more or less corrupt⁵.

Milanesi was the first to divide the *Comento* into *Lezioni*, a convenient arrangement which is found in two out of the four MSS., including the one made use of by Ciccarelli and by Moutier⁶, though they for some reason or other chose to ignore it. It is doubtful how far these *Lezioni*, which are sixty in number, represent so many actual lectures delivered by Boccaccio; for not only are they entirely devoid of any of the conventional formulae which a speaker addressing a public audience

¹ Ciccarelli anagrammatized his name into Cellenio Zacclori, under which form his signature is appended to the dedication of the edition. In some copies the *Comento* volumes are numbered independently of the collection to which they belong.

² See Moutier's remarks, and the list of *errata* given by him, on pp. vi–xvi of Vol. I. of his edition.

³ *Op. cit.*, Vol. I. p. vi.

⁴ See Milanesi, *op. cit.*, I. v.

⁵ See Milanesi, *op. cit.*, I. vi.

⁶ See Milanesi, *loc. cit.*

naturally employs when breaking off or resuming his discourse, but they also vary very greatly in length. The shortest of them, for instance, the forty-third, occupies only four pages in Milanese's edition, while the longest, the eighteenth, fills no less than forty¹,—a disproportion which would hardly be tolerable in the case of actual lectures.

It may be noted here that in no part of the *Comento*, as it has come down to us, is there much trace of the peculiar conditions under which it was composed. Boccaccio did not readily, it seems, exchange the rôle of author for that of professor. If it were not for a single passage at the beginning of his opening lecture, in which he directly addresses his audience as 'Voi, signori fiorentini²,' it would be difficult to gather from the work itself that it was composed originally for public delivery³. That the lectures were carefully thought out and prepared beforehand is evident, not only from the plan of the work, but also from the many cases in which points are reserved for future discussion. For example at the mention of Mantua in his second *Lezione* Boccaccio says: 'd' essa si tratterà nel ventesimo canto di questo pienamente'; and of Dardanus in the fourth: 'del quale più distesamente diremo appresso nel quarto canto'; and so on⁴. In like manner he several times refers forward to the commentary on the *Purgatorio*⁵, and to that on the *Paradiso*⁶, both of which, it is clear, were already to some extent planned, though, as we know, neither of them was actually begun. In one instance a memorandum has been preserved, in the text, of a passage which was to be further elaborated, but which was eventually left unaltered⁷.

The plan of Boccaccio's commentary was obviously borrowed from Dante himself. Just as Dante in the *Convivio* divides and subdivides each of his canzoni into principal and secondary parts⁸, and expounds in turn first the *litterale sentenza* and then the *allegoria* of each of the

¹ Milanese, II. 266–70; and I. 427–67.

² Milanese, I. 81.

³ It is significant that Boccaccio not infrequently uses *scrivere* instead of *parlare* in speaking of his lectures. For instance, in *Lez.* 2: 'Perciocché d' essa si tratterà nel XX canto di questo pienamente, qui non curo di più scriverne' (I. 120); again, in *Lez.* 20: 'Quantunque questa materia d' amore venga pienamente a dovere essere trattata nel secondo libro di questo volume, nel canto XVII; nondimeno...alcuna cosa qui ne scriverò' (I. 480); and in *Lez.* 52: 'Perciocché di Catone pienamente si scriverà nel primo canto del *Purgatorio*, qui a più dirne non mi distendo' (II. 366).

⁴ Milanese, I. 120 and 143; for other references in the case of the *Inferno*, see I. 442; II. 25, 170, 389, 429, 455–6.

⁵ Five times; see I. 480; II. 6, 46, 57, 366.

⁶ Three times; see II. 57, 177, 224.

⁷ See I. 465: '(Qui del modo del vegghiare, e come di qua il recarono i Marsiliesi, e donde vennero le vigilie).'

⁸ Cf. *Comento*, II. 2, ll. 58 ff.; 8, ll. 6 ff.; III. 1, ll. 100ff.; 2, ll. 1 ff., &c. &c.

poems under discussion¹; so, in the case of the *Commedia*, Boccaccio divides and subdivides the poem and its parts², and then proceeds to give first the literal and afterwards the allegorical exposition of each canto³.

Boccaccio opens his first lecture with a modest reference to his own insufficiency for the task which has been laid upon him; and he throws in an adroit compliment to his audience, whom he describes as ‘uomini d’ alto intendimento e di mirabile perspicacità, come universalmente solete esser voi, signori fiorentini⁴.’ After quoting (through the medium of Chalcidius⁵) what Plato says in the *Timaeus* as to the propriety of calling upon the deity before entering upon any serious undertaking, he proceeds to invoke the divine aid on his own behalf. This he does, not in scriptural phrase, nor in any form of Christian prayer, but, strangely enough, in the words of Anchises in the second *Aeneid*:—

Jupiter omnipotens, precibus si flecteris ullis,
Aspice nos: hoc tantum: et, si pietate meremur,
Da deinde auxilium, pater!⁶

Boccaccio’s excuse for this extraordinary combination of piety and paganism is that as the matter of which he is about to treat is of a poetical nature, so it is appropriate that his invocation of God’s aid should be in poetical form.

He then goes on to examine into the three points which he says it is customary to determine with regard to every learned work, namely of what sort and how many are the causes of it, what is its title, and to what department of philosophy it belongs. In his determination of these questions Boccaccio quotes freely, though without mentioning it by name, from the so-called dedicatory letter of Dante to Can Grande della Scala⁷, as to the authenticity of which there is a wide difference of opinion among Dantists, the tendency at present, especially in Italy, being to regard it as a falsification⁸.

¹ Cf. *Convivio*, II. 1, ll. 119 ff.: ‘Io adunque...sopra ciascuna canzone ragionerò prima la litterale sentenza, e appresso di quella ragionerò la sua allegoria.’

² Cf. *Comento*, I. 103.

³ Cf. *Comento*, I. 106.

⁴ *Comento*, I. 81.

⁵ Boccaccio does not mention Chalcidius, but the passage he quotes is from the version of Chalcidius, in which form the *Timaeus* was familiar to mediaeval students before the revival of Greek letters. Boccaccio’s quotation, as printed, differs from the received text of the passage in Chalcidius, in reading *hominibus mos est* for *omnibus*; and *raptemur* (altered by Milanese into *rapiemur*) for *raptamur*.

⁶ *Aeneid* II. 689–91.

⁷ Compare *Comento*, I. 82–5 with Epist. x. §§ 8, 9, 15, 10.

⁸ On the whole question, see the article by Dr Moore, in his *Studies in Dante*, III. 284–369, where the authenticity of the letter is strongly upheld.

In discussing the title of the work Boccaccio has some interesting remarks as to the inappropriateness, to his thinking, of the term *Comedy* applied by Dante to his poem. Comedy, he says, as everybody knows, deals with low subjects and with persons of low degree; whereas Dante's poem treats of persons of eminence, and of singular and notable deeds both wicked and virtuous, as well as of the effects of penitence, the ways of the angels, and the essence of the Deity. The style of Comedy, again, is humble and low, as befits the subject matter; whereas the style of the poem is ornate and sublime, notwithstanding it is written in the vulgar tongue, while if Dante had written it in Latin it would have been still more sublime and dignified¹.

Dante's name, which he discusses in connection with the title of the poem, Boccaccio takes to be, not an abbreviated form of Durante, as it is now commonly explained, but a term significant of the poet's bounty—Dante, the giver—in placing the treasures of his mind freely at the disposal of all who may be inclined to partake of them. He insists that Dante introduces his own name, not once, but twice into the *Commedia*²; firstly, by the mouth of Beatrice in the well-known passage in the thirtieth canto of the *Purgatorio*³; secondly, by the mouth of Adam in the twenty-sixth canto of the *Paradiso*³. With regard to the latter passage, he argues that it was especially appropriate for Dante to be named by Adam, to whom God assigned the task of naming all created things. The majority of commentators, however, differ from Boccaccio on this point, holding that *Da te*, not *Dante*, is the correct reading of the line in question.

After deciding that the *Commedia* comes under the head of moral philosophy, Boccaccio proposes to deal with the subject of Hell. But before entering upon this part of his task, he once more apologizes for the feebleness of his powers; and, further, in case he shall be betrayed through ignorance or inadvertency into saying anything that may be contrary to the catholic faith, he then and there formally recants and abjures the same, beforehand, and humbly submits himself in respect thereof to the correction of Holy Church⁵.

Having thus discounted the possibility of ecclesiastical censure Boccaccio launches out into a lengthy disquisition upon the matter in hand, namely Hell—whether there be a Hell, whether there be more than one, in what part of the world it is situated, from what point it is

¹ *Comento*, I. 84–5.

³ *Purg.* xxx. 55.

⁵ *Comento*, I. 91.

² *Comento*, I. 90–1.

⁴ *Par.* xxvi. 103 ff.

approached, what is its shape and dimension, what purpose it serves, and lastly, whether it is called by any name other than *Infernus*. To the discussion of these points he devotes what amounts to some ten printed pages in Milanese's edition of the commentary¹, at least half of the matter being translated word for word from a previous work of his own, the *De Genealogia Deorum*—a practice in which, as will be shown later, Boccaccio indulged to an extent hitherto quite unsuspected².

The subject of Hell being disposed of, there yet remains, before we arrive at the commentary proper, the question why Dante wrote his poem in the vulgar tongue instead of in Latin. This question, says Boccaccio, much exercised the *litterati* of the day. They could not understand how a man of deep learning like Dante could bring himself to compose such an important work in the *volgare*. Boccaccio's explanation, which is practically identical with what he had already said in his *Vita di Dante*³, is as follows:—'Dante was certainly a very learned man, especially in poetry, and desirous of fame, as most of us are. He began his poem in Latin, thus:

Ultima regna canam fluido contermina mundo,
Spiritibus quae lata patent, quae praemia solvunt,
Pro meritis cuicumque suis, etc.

But when he had made some progress with it in this fashion he decided to change his style. For he saw that liberal and philosophical studies were altogether abandoned by the princes and great men who used to honour and render famous poets and their works. And he reflected that if Virgil and the other Latins were almost entirely neglected, he could not expect a better fate for his own work. He therefore made up his mind to suit his poem, at least so far as concerned its outside form, to the understandings of the present generation, who, if by chance they wish to see any book, and it happens to be written in Latin, straightaway have it translated into the vernacular. From which he concluded that if his poem were written in the vulgar tongue it might meet with favour; whereas if it were in Latin it could be cold-shouldered. So abandoning his Latin lines he wrote the *Commedia* in the vernacular rimes, as we see⁴.

Boccaccio now at last, after this lengthy prologue, enters upon the subject proper of his *lezioni*, namely the systematic exposition of the letter and the allegory of Dante's poem. His commentary, like most of the early commentaries, is of very unequal value. Some of the

¹ *Comento*, I. 92 ff.

³ Ed. Milanese, pp. 64–5.

² See below, p. 117.

⁴ *Comento*, I. 102–3.

information supplied is of the most elementary, not to say childish, description; while, on the other hand, a large portion of the work displays real erudition and scholarship, and is the outcome of considerable research. The curious mixture of learning and simplicity makes one wonder for what sort of audience Boccaccio's lectures were intended. In the terms of the petition the lecturer was to expound the *Commedia* for the benefit of 'etiam non grammatici¹.' But it is difficult to conceive that any audience of Florentines, even of Florentine children, however ignorant of Latin, let alone the 'uomini d' alto intendimento e di mirabile perspicacità,' to whom Boccaccio refers in such flattering terms in his opening lecture², could require to be informed, as Boccaccio carefully informs them, that an oar, for instance, is 'a long thick piece of wood, with which the boatman propels his boat, and guides and directs it from one place to another³'; or that an anchor is 'an instrument of iron, which has at one end several grapples, and at the other a ring by which it is attached to a rope whereby it is let down to the bottom of the sea⁴; or that 'every ship has three principal parts, of which one is called the bows, which is sharp and narrow, because it is in front and has to cut the water; the second is called the poop, and is behind, where the steersman stands to work the tiller, by means of which, according as it is moved to one side or the other, the ship is made to go where the steersman wishes; while the third part is called the keel, which is the bottom of the ship, and lies between the bows and the stern⁵; and so on. Boccaccio, however, seems to have acted on the principle that it is the business of an expositor to expound, and consequently he lets his audience off nothing—not even the familiar Bible stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Ark, Pharaoh's daughter and Moses, and such like⁶. In fact, like certain modern editors, he is determined to empty his note-books, whether the information is wanted or no. For example, at the first mention of Aeneas he says, 'Although most people know well enough who Aeneas was, nevertheless I shall speak of him at length when we come to the fourth canto of this book⁷'—a promise, it is hardly necessary to say, which is amply fulfilled⁸.

Some not too friendly critic appears to have reproached Boccaccio for lecturing on the *Commedia* in this way to the vulgar herd, declaring that it was a degradation of Dante's lofty genius to endeavour to bring

¹ See above, p. 98, note 1.

³ *Comento*, I. 286.

⁵ *Comento*, II. 139.

⁷ *Comento*, I. 218

² *Comento*, I. 81.

⁴ *Comento*, II. 454.

⁶ *Comento*, I. 304 ff.

⁸ *Comento*, I. 347–50.

it down to the level of the lay comprehension. Boccaccio replied to these strictures in a sonnet, in which he practically pleads guilty; but he urges in extenuation that he was induced to undertake the task not only by the advice of his friends, ill-judged though it may have been; but also under the pressure of the 'res angusta domi,' which made the salary attached to the lectureship an important consideration¹. In another sonnet, written apparently about the same time, he complains bitterly that if he has done wrong in revealing to the 'profanum vulgus' the secrets of the Muses, he has at any rate paid dearly for his misdemeanour, inasmuch as Apollo has taken cruel vengeance upon his unfortunate body, not a limb of which but is ailing in consequence².

It was no doubt partly this failing of his health and energies which led Boccaccio to eke out his commentary with copious extracts from previous writings of his own—an expedient to which reference has already been made³. The works which he has laid under contribution in this way are the *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*⁴, the *De Claris Mulieribus*⁵, the *De Montibus, Sylvis, Lacubus, etc.*⁶, and the *De Genealogia Deorum*. From the last of these, which was completed in the same year in which his lectures were begun, he has borrowed something like a ninth part of the material of the *Comento*, amounting to more than a hundred printed pages in Milanesi's edition⁷. It is characteristic of the literary methods of the day that Boccaccio does not once refer to any one of these books by name, nor does he anywhere hint that he is making use of old material.

To make even a rapid survey of the numerous other authorities, classical and mediaeval, quoted by Boccaccio in the course of his *Comento*, would be beyond the scope of the present paper. I may, however, touch upon one or two points in this connection which are of especial interest from the humanistic point of view. Boccaccio's references to two particular authors entitle his commentary to an important place in the history of letters to which, merely as a com-

¹ *Opere*, ed. Moutier, Vol. XVI. Son. viii.

² *Opere*, ed. Moutier, Vol. XVI. Son. vii.

³ See above, p. 115.

⁴ *Comento*, I. 177 (for Sardanapalus), 180 (Jugurtha, Antiochus), 362 (Tarquinius Superbus), 435 (Minos); II. 18 (Simonides, Astyages), 36 (Xerxes), 65 (Croesus).

⁵ *Comento*, I. 143–4 (for Camilla), 214 (Ilia), 359 (Penthesilea), 361 (Lavinia), 362 (Lucretia), 367 (Julia), 437 (Europa), 448–51 (Semiramis), 451–6 (Dido), 457–62 (Cleopatra), 463–6 (Helen), 498 (Zenobia); II. 190 (Artemisia), 435 (Guadrada).

⁶ *Comento*, I. 479 (for Po); II. 51 ('faro di Messina'), 149 ('Iago'), 184 (Rhône), 220 ('Tireno'), 368 ('Abila e Setta'), 385 ('stagno'), 448–9 (Monte Veso, Appennino).

⁷ *Comento*, I. 92–5, 99–101, 123–6, 128–35, 198, 201–8, 211, 214–5, 225–9, 259, 270–1, 272, 284–5, 293, 296, 322–3, 342–50, 359–61, 390–4, 433–8, 442, 451, 467–73, 480–2, 495; II. 3, 41, 47–8, 72, 75–8, 83–90, 136–8, 170–1, 177–82, 195–202, 203–6, 268–9, 273–4, 283–6, 308–9, 314, 315, 318–22, 327, 328, 337, 392, 393, 399–400, 427.

mentary on the *Divina Commedia*, it could never have aspired. In this work and in the *De Genealogia Deorum* occur for the first time in mediaeval literature quotations from the works of Tacitus, and from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer. The story of how Boccaccio came to have access to Homer through the medium of a Latin translation, and of how this translation came to be made, has already been told elsewhere¹. Boccaccio's quotations from Homer in the *Comento* are six in number,—four from the *Iliad*², and two from the *Odyssey*³—one being a verbatim quotation from the Latin translation just mentioned⁴, of which the original MS. is now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris⁵. Previous to the making of this translation Homer had only been accessible to mediaeval writers, as to Dante, for instance, in the miserable compendium of the *Iliad* in Latin hexameters known as *Pindarus Thebanus*; or in such meagre quotations as could be found in the Latin translations of Aristotle, or in the works of Cicero⁶.

Tacitus was known by name to several mediaeval writers before the time of Boccaccio. He is mentioned, for instance, by John of Salisbury (d. 1180) in the *Policraticus* (viii. 18), as well as by Peter of Blois (d. 1200) and Vincent of Beauvais (d. 1264)⁷. But to Boccaccio belongs the distinction of being the first author of modern times to show any actual acquaintance with his works⁸. In what way the works of Tacitus came into the hands of Boccaccio is a matter of conjecture. That he had in his own possession a copy of some portion of them is certain;

¹ 'Homer in Dante and in Benvenuto da Imola,' in my *Dante Studies and Researches*, pp. 204 ff.

² *Comento*, I. 347, 462, 467, 511.

³ *Comento*, I. 97, 466.

⁴ *Comento*, I. 511: the passage (from *Iliad*, XIV. 214–17), as printed by Milanese, runs as follows: 'Et a pectoribus solvit ceston cingulum varium, ubi sibi voluptaria omnia ordinata est, ubi inerat amicitia, atque cupido, atque facundia, blanditiae quae furant intellectum, studiose licet scientium etc.' For *furant* (an impossible reading) Ciccarelli and Moutier read *furatae*. In the MS. of the translation in the Bibliothèque Nationale (MS. Lat. 7881), which originally belonged to Petrarch and was executed for him, the passage runs as follows:—'Et a pectoribus solvit ceston cingulum varium, ubi sibi voluntaria omnia facta erant. Ubi certe amicitia atque cupido atque collocutio Blanditiaeque furate sunt sensum studiose set scientium.' This same passage is quoted by Boccaccio, together with the original Greek, in the third book of his *De Genealogia Deorum*, where the text of the translation agrees neither with that of the *Comento* nor that of the MS.: 'Et a pectoribus solvit ceston cingulum vanum, ubi sibi voluntaria omnia ordinata erant, ubi certe amicitia atque cupido atque facundia, blanditiaeque furate mentem licet studiose scientium' (ed. 1532, p. 71).

⁵ See previous note.

⁶ See my *Dante Studies and Researches*, pp. 204–5.

⁷ See Hortis, *Opere Latine del Boccaccio*, p. 425.

⁸ St Jerome mentions the works of Tacitus; and a monk of Fulda in the ninth century, one Ruodolphus, quotes a passage which has been identified in the *Annals*; but from that time until he was brought to light again by Boccaccio, Tacitus seems to have been entirely lost sight of.

for in a letter written by him from Naples in January 1371, to Niccolò da Montefalcone, he urgently entreats his correspondent to return to him, for fear of its getting further damaged, his MS. of Tacitus, which Niccolò had taken away:—‘Quaternum quem asportasti Cornelii Taciti queso saltem mittas ne laborem meum frustraveris et libro deformitatem ampliorem addideris¹.’ From the expression ‘ne laborem meum frustra-veris’ it has been concluded that this MS. was a copy, which Boccaccio had made with his own hands. But the fact that he refers to the MS. as being already damaged, points rather to its being an ancient MS. Hortis² plausibly conjectures that Boccaccio may have managed to secure possession of this MS. when he paid his famous visit to the monastery of Monte Cassino, of which he gave the well-known account recorded by Benvenuto da Imola. It will be remembered that he found the library quite unprotected, and the books lying about in a state of utter neglect³. The MS. of Tacitus, now preserved in the Laurentian Library at Florence, belonged originally to Monte Cassino, and it is not at all improbable that it was Boccaccio who rescued it from the careless keeping of the unworthy Benedictine monks.

Boccaccio seems to have been acquainted with the twelfth to the sixteenth books of the *Annals*, and the second and third books of the *Histories*. In his *Comento* he utilizes chapters 56–7 and 69–70 of the fifteenth book of the *Annals*, for his account of the death of Lucan, ‘secondochè Cornelio Tacito scrive⁴’; and books twelve to fifteen of the same work, for his account of the career and death of Seneca, his indebtedness in this latter instance amounting to five and a half printed pages in Milanesi’s edition⁵. It may be noted that Boccaccio nowhere employs the title *Annals*, with which we are familiar, but uses the term *Storie*—‘secondochè scrive Cornelio Tacito nel decimo quinto libro delle sue Storie’—even when he is actually quoting from the *Annals*⁶. It is hardly necessary to add that the fact of Boccaccio’s having been acquainted with at least five books of the *Annals* of Tacitus effectually disposes of the theory, put forward some thirty years ago, that the *Annals* were forged in Italy in the fifteenth century by Poggio Bracciolini⁷. Of the *Histories*, so far as I can discover, Boccaccio

¹ This letter is printed, in a corrupt form, by Corazzini in his *Lettere di M. Giovanni Boccaccio* (p. 259). The corrections in the passage quoted in the text are due to Hortis (*Opere Latine del Boccaccio*, p. 425, n. 4).

² Hortis, *loc. cit.*

³ See my *Dante Studies and Researches*, pp. 233–4.

⁴ *Comento*, I. 333–4.

⁵ *Comento*, I. 397–402.

⁶ *Comento*, I. 400.

⁷ See introduction to Furneaux’s edition of the *Annals* (Oxford, 1884).

made no use in his *Comento*, although he appears to have utilized the second and third books to some extent in a previous work, the *De Claris Mulieribus*¹. To his intimate friend and literary correspondent, Petrarch, Boccaccio singularly enough does not seem to have communicated his discovery of the MS. of Tacitus—at any rate there is no allusion to the subject in such of their correspondence as has been preserved; nor does Petrarch anywhere mention the name of Tacitus, which in his case may be accepted as almost conclusive proof that he had no acquaintance with Tacitus' works².

I may mention, in conclusion, that I hope on some future occasion to deal further with this interesting subject of the authors utilized or quoted by Boccaccio in his Commentary on the *Divina Commedia*, on which I have barely touched in the present article.

PAGET TOYNBEE.

¹ See Hortis, *loc. cit.* See also P. de Nolhac, *Boccace et Tacite* (in *Mélanges de l'Ecole de Rome*, tom. XII. 1892).

² See P. de Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l'humanisme*, pp. 266–7; and *Boccace et Tacite*, pp. 6–8.