Italian poet, born at Florence, 1265; died at Ravenna, Italy, 14 September, 1321. His own statement in the "Paradiso" (xxii, 112-117) that he was born when the sun was in Gemini, fixes his birthday between 18 May and 17 June.

He was the son of Alighiero di Bellincione Alighieri, a notary belonging to an ancient but decadent Guelph family, by his first wife, Bella, who was possibly a daughter of Durante di Scolaio Abati, a Ghibelline noble. A few months after the poet's birth, the victory of Charles of Anjou over King Manfred at Benevento (26 February, 1266) ended the power of the empire in Italy, placed a French dynasty upon the throne of Naples, and secured the predominance of the Guelphs in Tuscany. Dante thus grew up amidst the triumphs of the Florentine democracy, in which he took some share fighting in the front rank of the Guelph cavalry at the battle of Campaldino (11 June, 1289), when the Tuscan Ghibellines were defeated by the forces of the Guelph league, of which Florence was the head. This victory was followed by a reformation of the Florentine constitution, associated with the name of Giano della Bella, a great-hearted noble who had joined the people. By the Ordinances of Justice (1293) all nobles and magnates were more strictly excluded from the government, and subjected to severe penalties for offences against plebeians. To take any part in public life, it was necessary to be enrolled in one or other of the "Arts" (the guilds in which the burghers and artisans were banded together), and accordingly Dante matriculated in the guild of physicians and apothecaries. On 6 July, 1295, he spoke in the General Council of the Commune in favour of some modification in the Ordinances of Justice after which his name is frequently found recorded as speaking or voting in the various councils of the republic.

Already Dante had written his first book, the "Vita Nuova", or "New Life", an exquisite medley of lyrical verse and poetic prose, telling the story of his love for Beatrice, whom he had first seen at the end of his ninth year. Beatrice, who was probably the daughter of Folco Portinari, and wife of Simone de' Bardi, died in June, 1290, and the "Vita Nuova" was completed about the year 1294. Dante's love for her was purely
spiritual and mystical, the *amor amicitiae* defined by St. Thomas Aquinas: "That which is loved in love of friendship is loved simply and for its own sake". Its resemblance to the chivalrous worship that the troubadours offered to married women is merely superficial. The book is dedicated to the Florentine poet, Guido Cavalcanti, whom Dante calls "the first of my friends", and ends with the promise of writing concerning Beatrice "what has never before been written of any woman".

At the beginning of 1300 the papal jubilee was proclaimed by Boniface VIII. It is doubtful whether Dante was among the pilgrims who flocked to Rome. Florence was in a disastrous condition, the ruling Guelph party having split into two factions, known as *Bianchi* and *Neri*, "Whites" and "Blacks", which were led by Vieri de' Cerchi and Corso Donati, respectively. Roughly speaking, the *Bianchi* were the constitutional party, supporting the burgher government and the Ordinances of Justice; the *Neri*, at once more turbulent and more aristocratic, relied on the support of the populace, and were strengthened by the favour of the pope, who disliked and mistrusted the recent developments of the democratic policy of the republic. The discovery of a plot on the part of certain Florentines in the papal service (18 April) and a collision between the two factions, in which blood was shed (1 May), brought things to a crisis. On 7 May Dante was sent on an unimportant embassy to San Gemignano. Shortly after his return he was elected one of the six priors who for two months, together with the *gonfaloniere*, formed the *Signoria*, the chief magistracy of the republic. His term of office was from 15 June to 15 August. Together with his colleagues, he confirmed the anti-Papal measures of his predecessors, banished the leaders of both factions, and offered such opposition to the papal legate, Cardinal Matteo d'Acquasparta, that the latter returned to Rome and laid Florence under an interdict. Guido Cavalcanti had been among the exiled *Bianchi*; having contracted a fatal illness at Sarzana, he was allowed, together with the rest of his faction, to return to Florence, where he died at the end of August. This, however, was after Dante's term of office had ended. Enraged at this partial treatment, Corso Donati, in understanding with his adherents in Florence, appealed to the pope, who decided to send a French prince, Charles of Valois, with an armed force, as peacemaker. We find Dante, in 1301, prominent among the
ruling Bianchi in Florence. On 19 June, in the Council of the Hundred, he returned his famous answer, *Nihil fiat*, to the proposed grant of soldiers to the pope, which the Cardinal of Acquasparta had demanded by letter. After 28 September he is lost sight of. He is said to have been sent on a mission to the pope at the beginning of October, but this is disputed. On 1 November Charles of Valois entered Florence with his troops, and restored the Neri to power. Corso Donati and his friends returned in triumph, and were fully revenged on their opponents. Dante was one of the first victims. On a trumped-up charge of hostility to the Church and corrupt practices, he was sentenced (27 January, 1302), together with four others, to a heavy fine and perpetual exclusion from office. On 10 March, together with fifteen others, he was further condemned, as contumacious, to be burned to death, should he ever come into the power of the Commune. At the beginning of April the whole of the White faction were driven out of Florence.

A few years before his exile Dante had married Gemma di Manetto Donati, a distant kinswoman of Corso, by whom he had four children. He never saw his wife again; but his sons, Pietro and Jacopo, and one of his daughters, Beatrice, joined him in later years. At first, he made common cause with his fellow-exiles at Siena, Arezzo, and Forli, in attempting to win his way back to Florence with the aid of Ghibelline arms. Dante's name occurs in a document of 8 June, 1302 among the exiled Bianchi who at San Godenzo in the Apennines were forming an alliance with the Ubaldini to make war upon the Florentine Republic; but, in a similar agreement signed at Bologna on 18 June, 1303, he no longer appears among them. Between these two dates he had made his resolution to form a party by himself (Par., xvii, 61-68), and had sought refuge in the hospitality of Bartolommeo della Scala, the lord of Verona, where he first saw Can Grande della Scala, Bartolommeo's younger brother, then a boy of fourteen years, who became the hero of his later days.

Dante now withdrew from all active participation in politics. In one of his odes written at this time, the "Canzone of the Three Ladies" (Canz. xx), he finds himself visited in his banishment by Justice and her spiritual children, outcasts even as he, and declares that, since such are his companions in misfortune, he counts his exile an honour. His
literary work at this epoch centres round his *rime*, or lyrical poems, more particularly round a series of fourteen *canzoni* or odes, amatory in form, but partly allegorical and didactic in meaning, a splendid group of poems which connect the "Vita Nuova" with the "Divina Commedia". Early in 1304 he seems to have gone to Bologna. Here he began, but left unfinished, a Latin treatise, "De Vulgari Eloquentia", in which he attempts to discover the ideal Italian language, the noblest form of the vernacular, and then to show how it should be employed in the composition of lyrical poetry. Even in its unfinished state it is a most illuminating book to all who wish to understand the metrical form of the Italian *canzone*. On 10 March, 1306, the Florentine exiles were expelled from Bologna. In August we find Dante at Padua, and some weeks later in Lunigiana, where, on 6 October he acted as the representative of the Marquess Franceschino Malaspina in making peace between his family and the Bishop of Luni. About this time (1306-08) he began the "Convivio", or "Banquet" in Italian prose, a kind of popularization of Scholastic philosophy in the form of a commentary upon his fourteen odes already mentioned. Only four of the fifteen projected treatises were actually written, an introduction and three commentaries. In allegorical fashion they tell us how Dante became the lover of Philosophy, that mystical lady whose soul is love and whose body is wisdom, she "whose true abode is in the most secret place of the Divine Mind".

All certain traces of Dante are now lost for some years. He is said to have gone to Paris some time between 1307 and 1309, but this is open to question. In November, 1308, Henry of Luxemburg was elected emperor as Henry VII. In him Dante saw a possible healer of the wounds of Italy, a renovator of Christendom, a new "Lamb of God" (the expression is the poet's) who would take away the sins of the world. This drew him back again into the tempestuous sea of politics and the life of action. It was probably in 1309, in anticipation of the emperor's coming to Italy, that Dante wrote his famous work on the monarchy, "De Monarchiâ", in three books. Fearing lest he "should one day be convicted of the charge of the buried talent", and desirous of "keeping vigil for the good of the world", he proceeds successively to show that such a single supreme temporal monarchy as the empire is necessary for the well-being of the world, that the Roman people acquired universal sovereign sway by Divine right, and that the
authority of the emperor is not dependent upon the pope, but descends upon him directly from the fountain of universal authority which is God. Man is ordained for two ends: blessedness of this life, which consists in the exercise of his natural powers and is figured in the terrestrial paradise; blessedness of life eternal, which consists in the fruition of the Divine aspect in the celestial paradise to which man's natural powers cannot ascend without the aid of the Divine light. To these two ends man must come by diverse means: "For to the first we attain by the teachings of philosophy, following them by acting in accordance with the moral and intellectual virtues. To the second by spiritual teachings, which transcend human reason, as we follow them by acting according to the theological virtues." But, although these ends and means are made plain to us by human reason and by revelation, men in their cupidity would reject them, were not they restrained by bit and rein. "Wherefore man had need of a twofold directive power according to his twofold end, to wit, the Supreme Pontiff, to lead the human race in accordance with things revealed, to eternal life; and the Emperor, to direct the human race to temporal felicity in accordance with the teachings of philosophy." It is therefore the special duty of the emperor to establish freedom and peace "on this threshing floor of mortality". Mr. Wicksteed (whose translation is quoted) aptly notes that in the, "De Monarchiâ" "we first find in its full maturity the general conception of the nature of man, of government, and of human destiny, which was afterwards transfigured, without being transformed, into the framework of the Sacred Poem".

The emperor arrived in Italy in September, 1310. Dante had already announced this new sunrise for the nations in an enthusiastic letter to the princes and peoples of Italy (Epist. v). He paid homage to Henry in Milan, early in 1311, and was much gratified by his reception. He then passed into the Casentino, probably on some imperial mission. Thence, on 31 March, he wrote to the Florentine Government (Epist. vi), "the most wicked Florentines within", denouncing them in unmeasured language for their opposition to the emperor, and, on 16 April, to Henry (Epist. vii), rebuking him for his delay, urging him to proceed at once against the rebellious city, "this dire plague which is named Florence". By a decree of 2 September (the reform of Baldo d'Aguglione), Dante is included in the list of those who are permanently excepted from all amnesty and grace by the commune of
Florence. In the spring of 1312 he seems to have gone with the other exiles to join the emperor at Pisa, and it was there that Petrarch, then a child in his eighth year, saw his great predecessor for the only time. Reverence for his fatherland, Leonardo Bruni tells us, kept Dante from accompanying the imperial army that vainly besieged Florence in September and October; nor do we know what became of him in the disintegration of his party on the emperor's death in the following August, 1313. A vague tradition makes him take refuge in the convent of Santa Croce di Fonte Avellana near Gubbio. It was possibly from thence that, after the death of Clement V, in 1314, he wrote his noble letter to the Italian cardinals (Epist. viii), crying aloud with the voice of Jeremias, urging them to restore the papacy to Rome.

A little later, Dante was at Lucca under the protection of Uguccione della Faggiuola, a Ghibelline soldier who had temporarily made himself lord of that city. Probably in consequence of his association with Uguccione the Florentines renewed the sentence of death against the poet (6 Nov. 1315), his two sons being included in the condemnation. In 1316 several decrees of amnesty were passed, and (although Dante was undoubtedly excluded under a provision of 2 June) some attempt was made to get it extended to him. The poet's answer was his famous letter to an unnamed Florentine friend (Epist. ix), absolutely refusing to return to his country under shameful conditions. He now went again to Verona, where he found his ideal of knightly manhood realized in Can Grande della Scala, who was ruling a large portion of Eastern Lombardy as imperial vicar, and in whom he doubtless saw a possible future deliverer of Italy. It is a plausible theory, dating from the fifteenth century, that identifies Can Grande with the "Veltro", or greyhound, the hero whose advent is prophesied at the beginning of the "Inferno", who is to effectuate the imperial ideals of the "De Monarchiâ", and succeed where Henry of Luxemburg had failed.

In 1317 (according to the more probable chronology) Dante settled at Ravenna, at the invitation of Guido Novello da Polenta. Here he completed the "Divina Commedia". From Ravenna he wrote the striking letter to Can Grande (Epist. x), dedicating the "Paradiso" to him, commenting upon its first canto, and explaining the intention and allegorical meaning of the whole poem. A letter in verse (1319) from Giovanni del Virgilio, a lecturer in Latin at the University of Bologna,
remonstrating with him for treating such lofty themes in the vernacular, inviting him to come and receive the laurel crown in that City, led Dante to compose his first "Eclogue" a delightful poem in pastoral Latin hexameters, full of human kindness and gentle humour. In it Dante expresses his unalterable resolution to receive the laurel from Florence alone, and proposes to win his correspondent to an appreciation of vernacular poetry by the gift of ten cantos of the "Paradiso". A second "Eclogue" was sent to Giovanni after Dante's death, but it is doubtful whether it was really composed by the poet. This correspondence shows that in 1319 the "Inferno" and "Purgatorio" were already generally known while the "Paradiso" was still unfinished. This was now sent in installments to Can Grande, as completed, between 1319 and 1321. If the "Quaestio de Aqua et Terra" is authentic, Dante was at Verona on 20 January, 1320, where he delivered a discourse on the relative position of earth and water on the surface of the globe; but, although the authenticity of this treatise has recently found strenuous defenders, it must still be regarded as doubtful. In July, 1321, Dante went on an embassy from Guido da Polenta to Venice. Two months later he died, at Ravenna, on the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, and was buried in the church of San Francesco in that city. The whole of the "Divina Commedia" had been published, with the exception of the last thirteen cantos of the "Paradiso", which were afterwards discovered by his son Jacopo and forwarded by him to Can Grande.

The "Divina Commedia" is an allegory of human life, in the form of a vision of the world beyond the grave, written avowedly with the object of converting a corrupt society to righteousness: "to remove those living in this life from the state of misery, and lead them to the state of felicity". It is composed of a hundred cantos, written in the measure known as terza rima, with its normally hendecasyllabic lines and closely linked rhymes, which Dante so modified from the popular poetry of his day that it may be regarded as his own invention. He is relating, nearly twenty years after the event, a vision which was granted to him (for his own salvation when leading a sinful life) during the year of jubilee, 1300, in which for seven days (beginning on the morning of Good Friday) he passed through hell, purgatory, and paradise, spoke with the souls in each realm, and heard what the Providence of God had in store for himself and to world. The
framework of the poem presents the dual scheme of the "De Monarchiâ" transfigured. Virgil, representing human philosophy acting in accordance with the moral and intellectual virtues, guides Dante by the light of natural reason from the dark wood of alienation from God (where the beasts of lust pride, and avarice drive man back from ascending the Mountain of the Lord), through hell and purgatory to the earthly paradise, the state of temporal felicity, when spiritual liberty has been regained by the purgatorial pains. Beatrice, representing Divine philosophy illuminated by revelation, leads him thence, up through the nine moving heavens of intellectual preparation, into the true paradise, the spaceless and timeless empyrean, in which the blessedness of eternal life is found in the fruition of the sight of God. There her place is taken by St. Bernard, type of the loving contemplation in which the eternal life of the soul consists, who commends him to the Blessed Virgin, at whose intercession he obtains a foretaste of the Beatific Vision, the poem closing with all powers of knowing and loving fulfilled and consumed in the union of the understanding with the Divine Essence, the will made one with the Divine Will, "the Love that moves the sun and the other stars".

The sacred poem, the last book of the Middle Ages, sums up the knowledge and intellectual attainment of the centuries that passed between the fall of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Renaissance; it gives a complete picture of Catholicism in the thirteenth century in Italy. In the "Inferno", Dante's style is chiefly influenced by Virgil, and, in a lesser degree, by Lucan. The heir in poetry of the great achievement of St. Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas Aquinas in christianizing Aristotle, his ethical scheme and metaphysics are mainly Aristotelean while his machinery is still that of popular medieval tradition. It is doubtful whether he had direct acquaintance with any other account of a visit to the spirit world, save that in the sixth book of the "Æneid". But over all this vast field his dramatic sense played at will, picturing human nature in its essentials, laying bare the secrets of the heart with a hand as sure as that of Shakespeare. Himself the victim of persecution and injustice, burning with zeal for the reformation and renovation of the world, Dante's impartiality is, in the main, sublime. He is the man (to adopt his own phrase) to whom Truth appeals from her immutable throne, as such, he relentlessly condemns the "dear and kind paternal image" of
Brunetto Latini to hell, though from him he had learned "how man makes himself eternal" while he places Constantine, to whose donation he ascribes the corruption of the Church and the ruin of the world in paradise. The pity and terror of certain episodes in the "Inferno" — the fruitless magnanimity of Farinata degli Uberti, the fatal love of Francesca da Rimini, the fall of Guido da Montefeltro, the doom of Count Ugolino — reach the utmost heights of tragedy.

The "Purgatorio", perhaps the most artistically perfect of the three canticles, owes less to the beauty of the separate episodes. Dante's conception of purgatory as a lofty mountain, rising out of the ocean in the southern hemisphere, and leading up to the Garden of Eden, the necessary preparation for winning back the earthly paradise, and with it all the prerogatives lost by man at the fall of Adam, seems peculiar to him; nor do we find elsewhere the purifying process carried on beneath the sun and stars, with the beauty of transfigured nature only eclipsed by the splendour of the angelic custodians of the seven terraces. The meeting with Beatrice on the banks of Lethe, with Dante's personal confession of an unworthy past, completes the story of the "Vita Nuova" after the bitter experiences and disillusions of a lifetime.

The essence of Dante's philosophy is that all virtues and all vices proceed from love. The "Purgatorio" shows how love is to be set in order, the "Paradiso" shows how it is rendered perfect in successive stages of illumination, until it attains to union with the Divine Love. The whole structure and spiritual arrangement of Dante's paradise, in which groups of saints make a temporary appearance in the lower spheres in token of the "many mansions", is closely dependent upon the teachings of the Pseudo-Dionysius and St. Bernard concerning the different offices of the nine orders of angels. It is doubtful whether he knew the "Celestial Hierarchy" of Dionysius at first hand, in the translation of Scotus Erigena; but St. Bernard's "De Consideratione" certainly influenced him profoundly. Dante's debt to the Fathers and Doctors of the Church has not yet been investigated with the fullness of research that has been devoted to elucidating his knowledge of the classical writers. His theology is mainly that of St. Thomas Aquinas, though he occasionally (as when treating of primal matter and of the nature of the celestial intelligences) departs from the teaching of the
Angelical Doctor. On particular points, the influence of St. Gregory, St. Isidore, St. Anselm, and St. Bonaventure may be traced; that of Boethius is marked and deep throughout. His mysticism is professedly based upon St. Augustine, St. Bernard, and Richard of St. Victor, while in many places it curiously anticipates that of St. John of the Cross. Mr. Wicksteed speaks of "many instances in which Dante gives a spiritual turn to the physical speculations of the Greeks". Even in the "Paradiso" the authority of Aristotle is, next to that of the Scriptures, supreme; and it is noteworthy that, when questioned by St. John upon charity, Dante appeals first of all to the Stagirite (in the "Metaphysics") as showing us the cause for loving God for Himself and above all things (Par., xxvi, 37-39). The harmonious fusion of the loftiest mysticism with direct transcripts from nature and the homely circumstance of daily life, all handled with poetic passion and the most consummate art, gives the "Divina Commedia" its unique character. The closing canto is the crown of the whole work sense and music are wedded in perfect harmony; the most profound mystery of faith is there set forth in supreme song with a vivid clearness and illuminating precision that can never be surpassed.

Dante's vehement denunciation of the ecclesiastical corruption of his times, and his condemnation of most of the contemporary popes (including the canonized Celestine V) to hell have led to some questioning as to the poet's attitude towards the Church. Even in the fourteenth century attempts were made to find heresy in the "Divina Commedia", and the "De Monarchiâ" was burned at Bologna by order of a papal legate. In more recent times Dante has been hailed as a precursor of the Reformation. His theological position as an orthodox Catholic has been amply and repeatedly vindicated, recently and most notably by Dr. Moore, who declares that "there is no trace in his writings of doubt or dissatisfaction respecting any part of the teaching of the Church in matters of doctrine authoritatively laid down". A strenuous opponent of the political aims of the popes of his own day, the beautiful episodes of Casella and Manfred in the "Purgatorio", no less than the closing chapter of the "De Monarchiâ" itself, bear witness to Dante's reverence for the spiritual power of the papacy, which he accepts as of Divine origin. Not the least striking testimony to his orthodoxy is the part played by the Blessed Virgin in the sacred poem from the beginning to the end. It is, as it were, the working out in
inspired poetry of the sentence of Richard of St. Victor: "Through Mary not only is the light of grace given to man on earth but even the vision of God vouchsafed to souls in Heaven."

Our earliest account of the life and works of Dante is contained in a chapter in the "Croniche Fiorentine" of Giovanni Villani (d. 1348), who speaks of the poet as "our neighbour". There are six commentaries extant on the "Divina Commedia", in whole or in part, composed within ten years of the poet's death. Three of these by Graziolo de' Bambaglioli, then chancellor of the commune of Bologna; an unidentified Florentine known as Selmi's Anonimo, and Fra Guido da Pisa, a Carmelite extend to the "Inferno" alone; those by Jacopo Alighieri, the poet's second son, Jacopo della Lana of Bologna, and the author of the "Ottimo Commento" deal with the entire poem. Graziolo appears as the first defender of Dante's orthodoxy (then fiercely assailed in Bologna); the author of the "Ottimo" (plausibly identified with a Florentine notary and poet, Andrea Lancia) professes to have actually spoken with Dante, and gives us various interesting details concerning his life. About 1340 Dante's elder son, Pietro Alighieri, set himself to elucidate his father's work; two versions of his Latin commentary have been preserved, the later containing additions which (if really his) are of considerable importance. Some time after 1348, Giovanni Boccaccio wrote the first formal life of Dante, the "Trattatello in laude di Dante", the authority of which once much derided, has been largely rehabilitated by more recent research. His commentary on the "Inferno" is the substance of lectures delivered at Florence in 1373. A few years later came the commentaries of Benvenuto da Imola and Francesco Buti, which were originally delivered as lectures at Bologna and Pisa respectively. Benvenuto's is a living book, full of humour and actuality as well as learning. The little "Life" by Leonardo Bruni (d. 1444), the famous chancellor of the Florentine Republic, which supplements Boccaccio's work with fresh information and quotes letters of the poet other than those which are now known and the slighter notice by Filippo Villani (c. 1404), who is the first commentator who refers in explicit terms to the "Letter to Can Grande", bring the first age of Dante interpretation to an appropriate close. The title of father of modern Dante scholarship unquestionably belongs to Karl Witte (1800-83), whose labours set students of the nineteenth century on the right path both in interpretation and in textual research. More
recently, mainly through the influence of G.A. Scartazzini (d. 1901), a wave of excessive scepticism swept over the field, by which the traditional events of Dante's life were regarded as little better than fables and the majority of his letters and even some of his minor works were declared to be spurious. This has now happily abated. The most pressing needs of Dante scholarship today are more textual study of the "Divina Commedia", a closer and more thorough acquaintance with every aspect of the minor works and a fuller investigation of Dante's position with regard to the great philosophies of the Middle Ages; such as will justify or restate the pregnant opening of the epitaph that Giovanni del Virgilio composed for his tomb: Theologus Dantes, nullius dogmatis expers quod foveat claro philosophia sinu ("Dante the theologian, skilled in every branch of knowledge that philosophy may cherish in her illustrious bosom").

Dante may be said to have made Italian poetry, and to have stamped the mark of his lofty and commanding personality upon all modern literature. It can even be claimed that his works have had a direct share in shaping the aspirations and destinies of his native country. His influence upon English literature begins with the poetry of Chaucer, who hails him worthily in the "Monkes Tale", and refers his readers to him as "the grete poete of Itaille that highte Dant". Eclipsed for a while in Tudor times by the greater popularity of Petrarch, he was afterwards ignored or contemned from the Restoration until the end of the eighteenth century. The first complete translation of the "Divina Commedia" into English, the work of an Irishman, Henry Boyd, was published in 1802 (that of the "Inferno" having been issued in 1785). Dante came again into his heritage among us with the great flood of noble poetry that the beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed. The eloquent tributes rendered to him by Shelley (in "Epipsychidion", the "Triumph of Life", and "A Defence of Poetry") and by Byron (especially in the "Prophecy of Dante") as after them by Browning and Tennyson, need not be repeated here. Through Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, he has been a fruitful influence in art no less than in letters. In the interpretation and criticism of Dante, English-speaking scholars at present stand second only to the Italians.

Never, perhaps, has Dante's fame stood so high as at the present day, when he is universally recognized as ranking with Homer, Æschylus,
Sophocles, and Shakespeare, among the few supreme poets of the world. It has been well observed that his inspiration resembles that of the Hebrew prophet more than that of the poet as ordinarily understood. His influence moreover, is by no means confined to mere literature. A distinguished Unitarian divine has pointed out that the modern cult of Dante is "a sign of enlarging and deepening spiritual perception as well as literary appreciation", and that it is one of the chief indications of "the renewed hold which the later Middle Ages have gained upon modern Europe" (Wicksteed, "The Religion of Time and of Eternity"). The poet's own son Pietro Alighieri, declared that, if the Faith were extinguished, Dante would restore it, and it is noteworthy today that many serious non-Catholic students of life and letters owe a totally different conception of the Catholic religion to the study of the "Divina Commedia". The power of the sacred poem in popularizing Catholic theology and Catholic philosophy, and rendering it acceptable, or at least intelligible to non-Catholics, is at the present day almost incalculable.

The place of honour among Dante societies belongs unquestionably and in every sense to the "Societa Dantesca Italiana", an admirably conducted association with its headquarters at Florence, which welcomes foreign students among its members, and is distinguished for its high and liberal scholarship. In addition to courses of lectures delivered under its auspices in various Italian cities, it publishes a quarterly "Bulletino", a survey of contemporary Dante literature, and has begun a series of critical editions of the minor works. Of these latter, volumes dealing with the "De Vulgari Eloquentia" and the "Vita Nuova", by Pio Rajna and Michele Barbi respectively, have already appeared, and may be truly said to mark an epoch in the critical and textual study of Dante's Latin and Italian writings alike. The association known as the "Dante Alighieri", on the other hand, is essentially a national and political society, and is only indirectly concerned with the poet whose name it bears. Of Dante societies other than Italian, the "American Dante Society" of Cambridge, Massachusetts, stands first in importance. The small but distinguished "Oxford Dante Society" does work of a high order of scholarship. The "Dante Society of London" is noteworthy for its large number of members, and publishes its sessional lectures in volume form; but its aims appear to be social rather than scholarly.