restored to a psychological outlook which has the virtue of having been really, and historically, the common outlook of all, and which is still the outlook of a great number of Christians of the Greek Orthodox Church and also no doubt of Eastern Catholics, since the code does not apply to them.

These notes could easily lead to laxity if in interpreting them one forgot the spirit in which they were written.

We beg that they should be read with the eye of charity; they presuppose an earnest Christian life and a profound and anxious desire for perfection. This therapeutic method is designed for spiritual progress, for the work of sanctification. It is intended for souls of good will, sincere and true, and desirous of nothing but God. In order to understand them well they ought to be read in an atmosphere of prayer. They seek to be of service for a deepening of spiritual outlook which surely is nothing else than liberation from artificiality and immersion into reality. We have wished to insist upon a desire for that realism, frequently unconscious, which through law seeks to lead to life; this is the secret desire of many minds for whom the beneficent progress of law is considered, not indeed as life itself, but as leading to life.

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'THE FIGURE OF BEATRICE'[1]

On his first page Mr. Williams tells us what he has undertaken to study in this book. It is a good statement and may be quoted at length. ' Beatrice was, in her degree an image of nobility, of virtue, of the Redeemed Life, and in some sense of Almighty God himself. But she also remained Beatrice right to the end . . . . Just as there is no point in Dante's thought at which the image of Beatrice in his mind was supposed to exclude the actual objective Beatrice, so there is no point at which the objective Beatrice is to exclude the Power which is expressed through her. But as the mental knowledge or image of her is the only way by which she her-

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[1] *The Figure of Beatrice.* A Study in Dante. By Charles Williams. (Faber, 10s. 6d.).

self can be known, so she . . . is (for Dante) the only way by which that other Power can be known—since, in fact, it was known so. The maxim of his study, as regards the final Power, was: 'This also is Thou, neither is this Thou.'

I say 'the only way,' but only to modify it. There were . . . . many other shapes—of people and places, of philosophies and poems. All these had their own identities. . . . But in his poetry Dante determined to relate them all to the Beatrician figure, and he brought that figure as near as he could to the final image, so far as he could express it, of Almighty God. It is, we all agree, one of the marks of his poetic genius. But it is something else also. It is the greatest expression in European literature of the way of approach of the soul to its ordained end through the affirmation of the validity of all those images, beginning with the image of a girl.' On this theme and following his Texts pretty closely Mr. Williams has written a remarkable book. It has ardour, originality and speed. So much is said and so concisely that when I had finished it, I had to turn back to page 1 and start reading again; it seemed perhaps too good to be true.

It is all about the meaning of Beatrice, what she meant to Dante and what she means to us and to anyone. It is fundamentally the same meaning—so Mr. Williams contends—because the meaning Beatrice had in her lover's mind is as real, as true, as her concrete existence in Florence between, say, 1265 and 1290. The real God-made girl had, in a sense, all the meaning the poet gave her; therefore she can safely be accepted by the rest of us as a type or symbol with a general Christian validity.

For us, of course, the symbol or, as Mr. Williams prefers to say, the *image*, the Beatrice-idea, is more real, i.e., more certain and important, than the *fact* of Beatrice. If Dante had never met Beatrice Portinari he would not, we suppose, have elaborated the Beatrice-doctrine; whereas we can take that meeting for granted and listen only to the doctrine. So this commentary plucks off its historical data on the wing. The commentator's reading is mostly implicit in what he says, and neither ' sources ' nor general æsthetics are his subject. He is sensitive to the wonderful Italian—light and intense as mountain air—but language is not his direct concern, nor, therefore, is poetry. Doctrine is his chief concern.

And this doctrine is, he thinks, true. Reality is like that. The world we know is a crowd of images of the divine being, each a focus, a prevailing preponderant image to a particular person at a particular time. We move forward by affirming as well as by re-

jecting. Again we are images to one another, we move one another forward. This, roughly, is 'Co-inherence.' And the pattern runs through all the world making a universal community, a City. A City made up of cities, of which one was Florence; a community of foci, of which one was Beatrice.

I must explain this further. The individual moves from one experience, from one focus presented to him; but if this be vivid enough he does not leave it when he moves from it: he goes through it into his human surroundings, his own city, Florence, and, in the light of it, into the heavenly city. That was Dante's assertion and movement, whose stages are *Vita Nuova, Convivio, De Monarchia, Commedia.* That is why his work is vitally one; why *Paradiso* fulfils the promise contained in that greeting of the *Vita* when the boy 'seemed to see the very limits of beatitude'; why the whole 'morality' of his life and work, its disciplines and denunciations, is a carrying out of what was implied in that other conjoined effect of the greeting, the flame, as he says, of charity, the total pardon of all who had wronged him, the response which was nothing but *Amore, con viso vestito di umiltade.* It is why, finally, 'at the end of *Paradiso* the only eyes to which the eyes of Beatrice give place are the eyes of Mary.' Why? Because Mary, though herself a mere image (in the sense indicated) bore him who is the substantial Godhead, the *end* of the way of images and the reality imaged by all (not forgetting, either, that he called himself 'The Way,' and that there is imaging in the Trinity). Therefore Mary's God-bearing is unique; to her, at the end of *Paradiso,* when all words have been weighed, is said *Figlia del tuo figlio.* Beatrice, as Dante carefully pointed out, begot in him only an accidental love, a quality. So she yields to Mary, as Mary to her Son. But what the poet also says, with all his work, is that Beatrice led him to Mary.

This tremendous assertion and vision forced the poet, as a poet, to imagine Beatrice as the link between Purgatory and Paradise (*Purg.* xxx—xxxiii); and the focal knot of union is in her eyes reflecting the two-natured Griffin who is Christ.

'The vehicle of Love,' says Mr. Williams, 'moves in Florence as (after an incomparable yet a comparable manner) it moved in Nazareth.' It is the Christian critics' compression of the Beatrice-doctrine. As such it falsifies, rather, the critic's book in which there is little expressly said about Mary and a great deal, in the light of the principles of Imagery and Co-inherence, about Sin, Damnation, Virtue, the City—all brought out by contact with the

Texts, working to and fro (but mostly forwards) between *Vita, Convivio* and *Commedia*. The comment on *Convivio* and *Inferno* is especially helpful, perhaps because of Mr. Williams' delight in Dante's profound sense of community—in evil as in good. So he links up the organism of damnation, from Francesca to Satan, from the little straying lust down through all the growing intellectualism of negation and isolation, to the 'treachery raised to an infinite cannibalism' at the bottom.

From another angle this book appears as a plea for a 'True romanticism.' Mr. Williams is not shy of talking about 'Romantic Theology.' In dantean terms this means the admission into the moral, into the Christian universe of Beatrice—and not Dante's Beatrice only but anyone's, and not in 13th century Florence only but in London or New York. It means too—Dante himself makes us so qualify—it means the recognition that this 'romantic beginning' is not ultimate, that, pervading the whole, as Beatrice pervades all the poets' work, it is measured by the end of the whole. as the eyes of Beatrice are measured by the Griffins' (Purg. xxxi), as her hands are lifted up to Mary begging for her lover the last vision.

To show how firmly Mr. Williams wishes to put aside false romanticism I had better give his own words. Of Dante's entry into political life he says, 'There may be quoted here that great sentence which is a governing clause in all his thoughts: *Unde est quod non operatio propria propter essentiam, sed haec propter illam habet ut sit.*' 'The proper operation (working or function) is not in existence for the sake of the being, but the being for the sake of the operation' (*De Monarchia I, iii*). This is true of Beatrice and Vergil and the Blessed Virgin and all his friends and enemies and himself also. Dante was created in order to do his business, to fulfil his function. Almighty God did not first create Dante and then find something for him to do. This is the primal law of all the images, of whatever kind; they were created for their working and in order to work. Hell is the cessation of work and the leaving of the images to be, without any function, merely themselves. It was the function of Dante, or so he thought, to be political.'

That is a qualification, almost a digression, though a most important one. Evidently a priest could not decently have written this book—nor the works of Dante for that matter. Both in this and those being now written it is left to us to decide whether, in Mr. Williams' words, 'We are to take the glory (of Beatrice) as seriously as Dante did,' as Mr. Williams does. For Dante that glory was 'heavenly,' for Mr. Williams it is also 'general,' i.e., it might hap-

pen to anyone. It is general, too, in the sense that its implications extend everywhere, as we are delightfully shown—outwards from Beatrice to Heaven and Hell, to the imaged and social perfection, to the deformed and social perversion, in an incandescent ramification of thought and expression. It seems to me the word ' Beatrice ' might stand in Dante's thought in a position similar to that of *ens* in St. Thomas'; in it everything is comprehended, including the *Inferno*. If you want to know *how*, this book is an attempt to explain; it is also an attempt, using the dantean key, to indicate a certain comprehension of anyone's love for anyone and the destiny of any soul.

Granted that the Beatrice-theme is, in general, puzzling, I would maintain that from this particular *doctrinal* point of view the poet himself has given us enough light. He could hardly be more insistent. The obscurity here is chiefly due to our own dulness, our weakness in grasping subtleties and recognising interconnections that are so unlaboriously expressed. So I take sides with Mr. Williams. He touches a spring that sets all the prose and verse in motion and interconnection. The proof? Taste and see. Dante anyhow emerges greatly enhanced. One cannot, for instance, take old Vossler very seriously (all honour to his learning) immediately after this; that equal balancing of Dante and Goethe, with the scales just tipping for Germany will not do now, for one reader.

Two blemishes, may, I think, be pointed out. First, the emphasis here thrown on the Beatrice--doctrine is a very moral one. There is perhaps a little too much protesting—too much in extent rather than degree. Before we close the book we have been reminded rather often of the author's feelings, of his sympathy for true romance and scorn of false; and the feelings are a little over-moralised, I thought. Secondly, in his treatment of *Paradiso*, in particular of the last Canto, too little stress, surely, is laid on the supernatural mystery; it seems too little stressed that here the Godhead blots out everything else. The meaning at the end is that all else, the mind and its image-making, dwindles to nothing (*A l'alta fantasia qui manco possa*)—and this even though, even *because*, the last three lines swing back to the creature (*Ma gia volgeva. . .*). They had, in the poem, to swing back because the poem could go forward no further. This is implicitly recognised in the commentary, but perhaps not as much as the poet would have desired.

Grace should round off a meal as well as begin it, so let these remarks end with gratitude for a very thrilling and subtle exposition of a grand theme. One ends it healthily tired.

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