

INTRODUCTION

THIS scholarly and significant study of the symbolism of Dante's *Divine Comedy* is appropriately published at a time when the whole world is celebrating the greatness of the poet as it marks the 600th anniversary of his death. Of the millions of human voices a few score are heard for a generation, perhaps as many as a dozen for a century, and but very, very few for all time. To strike the chord of human insight and human feeling that will vibrate unceasingly while time flies is a mark of genius so rare that it is the highest form of human achievement. The poet of mankind must speak a particular language, but he may speak it in a way that will confound the Tower of Babel and make the whole world understand. This has been done by Homer in Greek, by Dante in Italian, by Shakespeare in English, and by Goethe in German. Each of the four was in and for his time not only poet but philosopher; and it is the philosophy which has made the poetry live and which has given it a universal appeal.

Of all the forces which make for the solidarity and common interest of mankind, that set in motion by these four poets is the most powerful, the most constant, and the most long-continuing. They have taught men of different lands, of conflicting creeds, and of varying tongues, to think and to feel in common about the noblest experiences and the loftiest aspirations of life. They are both the prophets, the heralds, and the makers of a world's progress, seemingly so slow and so painful, toward those higher things which are, for human thinking, the aim and the purpose of all creation.

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