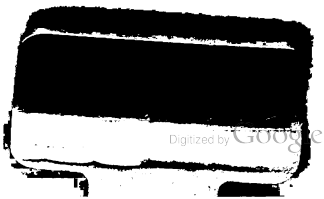
Dante's Divine comedy

Leigh Hunt, Dante Alighieri



DANTE'S DIVINE COMEDY

THE BOOK AND ITS STORY

Dante's meeting with Matilda.
From the painting by L.L Maignan.

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THE BOOK & ITS STORY

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NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
153-157 FIFTH AVENVE
1903

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DANTE'S LIFE AND GENIUS

DANTE'S LIFE AND GENIUS[1]

ANTE was a very great poet, a man of the strongest passions, a claimant of unbounded powers to lead and enlighten the world; and he lived in a semi-barbarous age, as favourable to the intensity of his imagination, as it was otherwise to the rest of his pretensions. Party zeal, and the fluctuations of moral and critical opinion, have at different periods over-rated and depreciated his memory; and if, in the following attempt to form its just estimate, I have found myself compelled, in some important respects, to differ with preceding writers, and to protest in particular against his being regarded as a proper teacher on any one point, poetry excepted, and as far as all such genius and

[1] As notices of Dante's life have often been little but repetitions of former ones, I think it due to the painstaking character of this volume to state, that besides consulting various commentators and critics, from Boccaccio to Fraticelli and others, I have diligently perused the *Vita di Dante*, by Cesare Balbo, with Rocco's annotations; the *Histoire littéraire d'Italie*, by Ginguené; the *Discorso sul Testo della Commedia*, by Foscolo; the *Amori e Rime di Dante* of Arrivabene; the *Veltro allegorico di Dante*, by Troja; and Ozanam's *Dante et la Philosophie catholique au treizième siècle.*

energy cannot in some degree help being, I have not been the less sensible of the wonderful nature of that genius, while acting within the circle to which it belongs. Dante was indeed so great a poet, and at the same time exhibited in his personal character such a mortifying exception to what we conceive to be the natural wisdom and temper of great poets; in other words, he was such a bigoted and exasperated man, and sullied his imagination with so much that is contradictory to good feeling, in matters divine as well as human; that I should not have thought myself justified in assisting, however humbly, to extend the influence of his writings, had I not believed a time to have arrived, when the community may profit both from the marvels of his power and the melancholy absurdity of its contradictions.

Dante Alighieri, who has always been known by his Christian rather than surname (partly owing to the Italian predilection for Christian names, and partly to the unsettled state of patronymics in his time), was the son of a lawyer of good family in Florence, and was born in that city on the 14th of May 1265 (sixty-three years before the birth of Chaucer). The stock is said to have been of Roman origin, of the race of the Frangipani; but the only certain trace of it is to Cacciaguida, a Florentine cavalier of the house of the Elisei, who died in the Crusades. Dante gives an account of him in his *Paradiso*.[1] Cacciaguida married a lady of the Alighieri family of the Valdipado; and, giving the name to one of his children, they subsequently retained it as a patronymic in preference

[1] Canto xv. 88.

to their own. It would appear, from the same poem, not only that the Alighieri were the more important house, but that some blot had darkened the scutcheon of the Elisei; perhaps their having been poor, and transplanted (as he seems to imply) from some disreputable district. Perhaps they were known to have been of ignoble origin; for, in the course of one of his most philosophical treatises, he bursts into an extraordinary ebullition of ferocity against such as adduce a knowledge of that kind as an argument against a family's acquired nobility; affirming that such brutal stuff should be answered not with words, but with the dagger.[1] The Elisei, however, must have been of some standing; for Macchiavelli, in his History of Florence, mentions them in his list of the early Guelph and Ghibelline parties, where the side which they take is different from that of the poet's immediate progenitors.[2] The arms of the Alighieri (probably occasioned by the change in that name, for it was previously written Aldighieri) are interesting on account of their poetical and aspiring character. They are a golden wing on a field azure.[3]

[1] For the doubt apparently implied respecting the district, see canto xvi. 43. The following is the passage alluded to in the philosophical treatise: "Risponder si vorrebbe, non colle parole, ma col coltello, a tanta bestialità." *Convito*,—*Opere Minori*, 12mo, Fir. 1834, vol. ii. p. 432. "Beautiful mode" (says Perticeri in a note) "of settling questions."

[2] *Istorie Fiorentine*, ii. 43 (in *Tutte le Opere*, 4to, 1550).

[3] The name has been varied into *Allagheri*, *Aligieri*, *Alleghieri*, *Alligheri*, *Aligeri*, with the accent generally on the third, but sometimes on the second syllable. See Foscolo, *Discorso sul Testo*, p. 432. He says, that in Verona, where descendants of the poet survive, they call it *Alìgeri*. But names, like other words, often wander so far from their

It is generally supposed that the name Dante is an abbreviation of Durante; but this is not certain, though the poet had a nephew so called. Dante is the name he goes by in the gravest records, in law-proceedings, in his epitaph, in the mention of him put by himself into the mouth of a blessed spirit. Boccaccio intimates that he was christened Dante, and derives the name from the ablative case of *dans* (giving)—a probable etymology, especially for a Christian appellation. As an abbreviation of Durante, it would correspond in familiarity with the Ben of Ben Jonson — a diminutive that would assuredly not have been used by grave people on occasions like those mentioned, though a wit of the day gave the masons a shilling to carve "O rare Ben Jonson!" on his grave-stone. On the other hand, if given at the font, the name of Ben would have acquired all the legal gravity of Benjamin. In the English Navy List, not long ago, one of our gallant admirals used to figure as "Billy Douglas."

Of the mother of Dante nothing is known except that she was his father's second wife, and that her Christian name was Bella, or perhaps surname Bello. It might, however, be conjectured, from

source, that it is impossible to ascertain it. Who would suppose that *Pomfret* came from *Pontefract*, or *wig* from *parrucca?* Coats of arms, unless in very special instances, prove nothing but the whims of the heralds.

Those who like to hear of anything in connexion with Dante or his name, may find something to stir their fancies in the following grim significations of the word in the dictionaries :—

"*Dante*, a kind of great wild beast in Africa, that hath a very hard skin."—*Florio's Dictionary*, edited by Torreggiano.

"*Dante*, an animal called otherwise the Great Beast."—*Vocabolario della Crusca*, *Compendiato*, Ven. 1729.

the remarkable and only opportunity which our author has taken of alluding to her, that he derived his disdainful character rather from his mother than father.[1] The father appears to have died during the boyhood of his illustrious son.

The future poet, before he had completed his ninth year, conceived a romantic attachment to a little lady who had just entered hers, and who has attained a celebrity of which she was destined to know nothing. This was the famous Beatrice Portinari, daughter of a rich Florentine who founded more than one charitable institution. She married another man, and died in her youth; but retained the Platonical homage of her young admirer, living and dead, and became the heroine of his great poem.

It is unpleasant to reduce any portion of a romance to the events of ordinary life; but with the exception of those who merely copy from one another, there has been such a conspiracy on the part of Dante's biographers to overlook at least one disenchanting conclusion to be drawn to that effect from the poet's own writings, that the probable truth of the matter must here for the first time be stated. The case, indeed, is clear enough from his account of it. The natural tendencies of a poetical temperament (oftener evinced in a like manner than the world in general suppose) not only made the boy-poet fall in love, but, in the truly Elysian state of the heart

[1] See the passage in "Hell," where Virgil, to express his enthusiastic approbation of the scorn and cruelty which Dante shews to one of the condemned, embraces and kisses him for a right "disdainful soul," and blesses the "mother that bore him."

at that innocent and adoring time of life, made him fancy he had discovered a goddess in the object of his love; and strength of purpose as well as imagination made him grow up in the fancy. He disclosed himself, as time advanced, only by his manner—received complacent recognitions in company from the young lady—offended her by seeming to devote himself to another (see the poem in the *Vita Nuova*, beginning "Ballata io vo")—rendered himself the sport of her and her young friends by his adoring timidity (see the 5th and 6th sonnets in the same work)—in short, constituted her a paragon of perfection, and enabled her, by so doing, to shew that she was none. He says, that finding himself unexpectedly near her one day in company, he trembled so, and underwent such change of countenance, that many of the ladies present began to laugh with her about him—"*si gabbavano di me*." And he adds, in verse,

> "Con l'altre donne mia vista gabbate,
> E non pensate, donna, onde si mova
> Ch' io vi rassembri sì figura nova,
> Quando riguardo la vostra beltate," &c. Son. 5.

"You laugh with the other ladies to see how I look (literally, you mock my appearance); and do not think, lady, what it is that renders me so strange a figure at sight of your beauty."

And in the sonnet that follows, he accuses her of preventing pity of him in others, by such "killing mockery" as makes him wish for death ("*la pietà, che 'l vostro gabbo recinde*," &c.).[1]

Now, it is to be admitted, that a young lady,

[1] *Opere Minori*, vol. iii. 12. Flor. 1839, pp. 292, &c.

if she is not very wise, may laugh at her lover with her companions, and yet return his love, after her fashion; but the fair Portinari laughs and marries another. Some less melancholy face, some more intelligible courtship, triumphed over the questionable flattery of the poet's gratuitous worship; and the idol of Dante Alighieri became the wife of Messer Simone de' Bardi. Not a word does he say on that mortifying point. It transpired from a clause in her father's will. And yet so bent are the poet's biographers on leaving a romantic doubt in one's mind, whether Beatrice may not have returned his passion, that not only do all of them (as far as I have observed) agree in taking no notice of these sonnets, but the author of the treatise entitled *Dante and the Catholic Philosophy of the Thirteenth Century*, "in spite" (as a critic says) "of the *Beatrice, his daughter, wife of Messer Simone de' Bardi*, of the paternal will," describes her as dying in "all the lustre of virginity."[1] The assumption appears to be thus gloriously stated, as a counterpart to the notoriety of its untruth. It must be acknowledged, that Dante himself gave the cue to it by more

[1] "Béatrix quitta la terre dans tout l'éclat de la jeunesse et de la virginité." See the work as above entitled, Paris, 1840, p. 60. The words in Latin, as quoted from the will by the critic alluded to in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* (No. 65, art. *Dante Allighieri*), are, "Bici filiæ suæ et uxori D. (Domini) Simonis de Bardis." "Bici" is the Latin dative case of Bice, the abbreviation of Beatrice. This employment, by the way, of an abbreviated name in a will, may seem to go counter to the deductions respecting the name of Dante. And it may really do so. Yet a will is not an epitaph, nor the address of a beatified spirit; neither is equal familiarity perhaps implied, as a matter of course, in the abbreviated names of male and female.

than silence; for he not only vaunts her acquaintance in the next world, but assumes that she returns his love in that region, as if no such person as her husband could have existed, or as if he himself had not been married also. This life-long pertinacity of will is illustrative of his whole career.

Meantime, though the young poet's father had died, nothing was wanting on the part of his guardians, or perhaps his mother, to furnish him with an excellent education. It was so complete, as to enable him to become master of all the knowledge of his time; and he added to this learning more than a taste for drawing and music. He speaks of himself as drawing an angel in his tablets on the first anniversary of Beatrice's death.[1] One of his instructors was Brunetto Latini, the most famous scholar then living; and he studied both at the universities of Padua and Bologna. At eighteen, perhaps sooner, he had shewn such a genius for poetry as to attract the friendship of Guido Cavalcante, a young noble of a philosophical as well as poetical turn of mind, who has retained a reputation with posterity: and it was probably at the same time he became acquainted with Giotto, who drew his likeness, and with Casella, the musician, whom he greets with so much tenderness in the other world.

Nor were his duties as a citizen forgotten. The year before Beatrice's death, he was at the battle of Campaldino, which his countrymen gained against the people of Arezzo; and the year after it he was present at the taking of Caprona from

[1] *Vita Nuova*, ut sup. p. 343.

the Pisans. It has been supposed that he once studied medicine with a view to it as a profession; but the conjecture probably originated in nothing more than his having entered himself of one of the city-companies (which happened to be the medical) for the purpose of qualifying himself to accept office; a condition exacted of the gentry by the then democratic tendencies of the republic. It is asserted also, by an early commentator, that he entered the Franciscan order of friars, but quitted it before he was professed; and, indeed, the circumstance is not unlikely, considering his agitated and impatient turn of mind. Perhaps he fancied that he had done with the world when it lost the wife of Simone de' Bardi.

Weddings that might have taken place but do not, are like the reigns of deceased heirs-apparent; everything is assumable in their favour, checked only by the histories of husbands and kings. Would the great but splenetic poet have made an angel and a saint of Beatrice, had he married her? He never utters the name of the woman whom he did marry.

Gemma Donati was a kinswoman of the powerful family of that name. It seems not improbable, from some passages in his works, that she was the young lady whom he speaks of as taking pity on him on account of his passion for Beatrice;[1] and in common justice to his feelings as a man and a gentleman, it is surely to be concluded, that he felt some sort of passion for his bride, if not of a very spiritual sort; though he afterwards did not scruple to intimate that he was ashamed of it, and

[1] *Vita Nuova*, p. 345.

Beatrice is made to rebuke him in the other world for thinking of anybody after herself.[1] At any rate, he probably roused what was excitable in his wife's temper, with provocations from his own; for the nature of the latter is not to be doubted, whereas there is nothing but tradition to shew for the bitterness of hers. Foscolo is of opinion that the tradition itself arose simply from a rhetorical flourish of Boccaccio's, in his Life of Dante, against the marriages of men of letters; though Boccaccio himself expressly adds, that he knows nothing to the disadvantage of the poet's wife, except that her husband, after quitting Florence, would never either come where she was, or suffer her to come to him, mother as she was by him of so many children;—a statement, it must be confessed, not a little encouraging to the tradition.[2]

[1] In the article on *Dante*, in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* (ut supra), the exordium of which made me hope that the eloquent and assumption-denouncing writer was going to supply a good final account of his author, equally satisfactory for its feeling and its facts, but which ended in little better than the customary gratuitousness of wholesale panegyric, I was surprised to find the union with Gemma Donati characterised as "calm and cold,—rather the accomplishment of a social duty than the result of an irresistible impulse of the heart," p. 15. The accomplishment of the "social duty" is an assumption, not very probable with regard to anybody, and much less so in a fiery Italian of twenty-six; but the addition of the epithets, "calm and cold," gives it a sort of horror. A reader of this article, evidently the production of a man of ability but of great wilfulness, is tempted to express the disappointment it has given him in plainer terms than might be wished, in consequence of the extraordinary license which its writer does not scruple to allow to his own fancies, in expressing his opinion of what he is pleased to think the fancies of others.

[2] "Le invettive contr' essa per tanti secoli originarono

Be this as it may, Dante married in his twenty-sixth year; wrote an adoring account of his first love (the *Vita Nuova*) in his twenty-eighth; and among the six children which Gemma brought him, had a daughter whom he named Beatrice, in honour, it is understood, of the fair Portinari; which surely was either a very great compliment, or no mean trial to the temper of the mother. We shall see presently how their domestic intercourse was interrupted, and what absolute uncertainty there is respecting it, except as far as conclusions may be drawn from his own temper and history.

Italy, in those days, was divided into the parties of Guelphs and Ghibellines; the former, the advocates of general church-ascendency and local government; the latter, of the pretensions of the Emperor of Germany, who claimed to be the Roman Cæsar, and paramount over the Pope. In Florence, the Guelphs had for a long time been so triumphant as to keep the Ghibellines in a state of banishment. Dante was born and bred a Guelph: he had twice borne arms for his country against Ghibelline neighbours; and now, at the age of thirty-five, in the ninth of his marriage, and last of his residence with his wife, he was appointed chief of the temporary administrators of affairs,

dalla enumerazione rettorica del Boccaccio di tutti gli inconvenienti del matrimonio, e dove per altro ei dichiara,—'Certo io non affermo queste cose a Dante essere avvenute, che non lo so; comechè vero sia, che o a simili cose a queste, o ad altro che ne fusse cagione, egli una volta da lei partitosi, che per consolazione de' suoi affanni gli era stata data, mai nè dove ella fusse volle venire, nè sofferse che dove egli fusse ella venisse giammai, con tutto che di più figliuoli egli insieme con lei fusse parente.'"—*Discorso sul Testo*, ut sup. Londra, Pickering, 1825, p. 184.

called Priors;—functionaries who held office only for two months.

Unfortunately, at that moment, his party had become subdivided into the factions of the Whites and Blacks, or adherents of two different sides in a dispute that took place in Pistoia. The consequences becoming serious, the Blacks proposed to bring in, as mediator, the French prince, Charles of Valois, then in arms for the Pope against the Emperor; but the Whites, of whom Dante was one, were hostile to the measure; and in order to prevent it, he and his brother magistrates expelled for a time the heads of both factions, to the satisfaction of neither. The Whites accused them of secretly leaning to the Ghibellines, and the Blacks of openly favouring the Whites; who being, indeed, allowed to come back before their time, on the alleged ground of the unwholesomeness of their place of exile, which was fatal to Dante's friend Cavalcante, gave a colour to the charge. Dante answered it by saying, that he had then quitted office; but he could not shew that he had lost his influence. Meantime, Charles was still urged to interfere, and Dante was sent ambassador to the Pope to obtain his disapprobation of the interference; but the Pope (Boniface the Eighth), who had probably discovered that the Whites had ceased to care for anything but their own disputes, and who, at all events, did not like their objection to his representative, beguiled the ambassador and encouraged the French prince; the Blacks, in consequence, regained their ascendency; and the luckless poet, during his absence, was denounced as a corrupt administrator of affairs, guilty of peculation; was severely mulcted;

banished from Tuscany for two years; and subsequently, for contumaciousness, was sentenced to be *burnt alive*, in case he returned ever. He never did return.

From that day forth, Dante never beheld again his home or his wife. Her relations obtained possession of power, but no use was made of it except to keep him in exile. He had not accorded with them; and perhaps half the secret of his conjugal discomfort was owing to politics. It is the opinion of some, that the married couple were not sorry to part; others think that the wife remained behind, solely to scrape together what property she could, and bring up the children. All that is known is, that she never lived with him more.

Dante now certainly did what his enemies had accused him of wishing to do: he joined the old exiles whom he had helped to make such, the party of the Ghibellines. He alleges, that he never was really of any party but his own; a naïve confession, probably true in one sense, considering his scorn of other people, his great intellectual superiority, and the large views he had for the whole Italian people. And, indeed, he soon quarrelled in private with the individuals composing his new party, however stanch he apparently remained to their cause. His former associates he had learnt to hate for their differences with him and for their self-seeking; he hated the Pope for deceiving him; he hated the Pope's French allies for being his allies, and interfering with Florence; and he had come to love the Emperor for being hated by them all, and for holding out (as he fancied) the only chance of reuniting Italy to their

confusion, and making her the restorer of himself, and the mistress of the world.

With these feelings in his heart, no money in his purse, and no place in which to lay his head, except such as chance-patrons afforded him, he now began to wander over Italy, like some lonely lion of a man, "grudging in his great disdain." At one moment he was conspiring and hoping; at another, despairing and endeavouring to conciliate his beautiful Florence; now again catching hope from some new movement of the Emperor's; and then, not very handsomely, threatening and re-abusing her; but always pondering and grieving, or trying to appease his thoughts with some composition, chiefly of his great work. It is conjectured, that whenever anything particularly affected him, whether with joy or sorrow, he put it, hot with the impression, into his "sacred poem." Everybody who jarred against his sense of right or his prejudices he sent to the infernal regions, friend or foe: the strangest people who sided with them (but certainly no personal foe) he exalted to heaven. He encouraged, if not personally assisted, two ineffectual attempts of the Ghibellines against Florence; wrote, besides his great work, a book of mixed prose and poetry on "Love and Virtue" (the *Convito*, or Banquet); a Latin treatise on Monarchy (*de Monarchia*), recommending the "divine right" of the Emperor; another in two parts, and in the same language, on the Vernacular Tongue (*de Vulgari Eloquio*); and learnt to know meanwhile, as he affectingly tells us, "how hard it was to climb other people's stairs, and how salt the taste of bread is that is not our own." It is even thought not improbable, from one awful

passage of his poem, that he may have "placed himself in some public way," and, "stripping his visage of all shame, and trembling in his very vitals," have stretched out his hand "for charity"[1] —an image of suffering, which, proud as he was, yet considering how great a man, is almost enough to make one's common nature stoop down for pardon at his feet; and yet he should first prostrate himself at the feet of that nature for his outrages on God and man.

Several of the princes and feudal chieftains of Italy entertained the poet for a while in their houses; but genius and worldly power, unless for worldly purposes, find it difficult to accord, especially in tempers like his. There must be great wisdom and amiableness on both sides to save them from jealousy of one another's pretensions. Dante was not the man to give and take in such matters on equal terms; and hence he is at one time in a palace, and at another in a solitude. Now he is in Sienna, now in Arezzo, now in Bologna; then probably in Verona with Can Grande's elder brother; then (if we are to believe those who have tracked his steps) in Casentino; then with the Marchese Moroello Malaspina in Lunigiana; then with the great Ghibelline chieftain Faggiuola in the mountains near Urbino; then in Romagna, in Padua, in *Paris* (arguing with the churchmen), some say in Germany, and at *Oxford;* then again in Italy; in Lucca (where he is supposed to have relapsed from his fidelity to Beatrice in favour of a certain "Gentucca"); then again in Verona with the new prince, the famous Can Grande (where his sarcasms appear

[1] Foscolo, in the *Edinburgh Review*, vol. xxx. p. 351.

to have lost him a doubtful hospitality); then in a monastery in the mountains of Umbria; in Udine; in Ravenna; and there at length he put up for the rest of his life with his last and best friend, Guido Novello da Polenta, not the father, but the nephew of the hapless Francesca.

It was probably in the middle period of his exile, that in one of the moments of his greatest longing for his native country, he wrote that affecting passage in the *Convito*, which was evidently a direct effort at conciliation. Excusing himself for some harshness and obscurity in the style of that work, he exclaims, "Ah! would it had pleased the Dispenser of all things that this excuse had never been needed; that neither others had done me wrong, nor myself undergone penalty undeservedly—the penalty, I say, of exile and of poverty. For it pleased the citizens of the fairest and most renowned daughter of Rome—Florence—to cast me out of her most sweet bosom, where I was born, and bred, and passed half of the life of man, and in which, with her good leave, I still desire with all my heart to repose my weary spirit, and finish the days allotted me; and so I have wandered in almost every place to which our language extends, a stranger, almost a beggar, exposing against my will the wounds given me by fortune, too often unjustly imputed to the sufferer's fault. Truly I have been a vessel without sail and without rudder, driven about upon different ports and shores by the dry wind that springs out of dolorous poverty; and hence have I appeared vile in the eyes of many, who, perhaps, by some better report had conceived of me a different impression, and in whose sight not only

has my person become thus debased, but an unworthy opinion created of everything which I did, or which I had to do."[1]

How simply and strongly written! How full of the touching yet undegrading commiseration which adversity has a right to take upon itself, when accompanied with the consciousness of manly endeavour and a good motive! How could such a man condescend at other times to rage with abuse, and to delight himself in images of infernal torment!

The dates of these fluctuations of feeling towards his native city are not known; but it is supposed to have been not very long before his abode with Can Grande that he received permission to return to Florence, on conditions which he justly refused and resented in the following noble letter to a kinsman. The old spelling of

[1] "Ahi piaciuto fosse al Dispensatore dell' universo, che la cagione della mia scusa mai non fosse stata; che nè altri contro a me avria fallato, nè io sofferto avrei pena ingiustamente; pena, dico, d' esilio e di povertà. Poichè fu piacere de' cittadini della bellissima e famosissima figlia di Roma, Fiorenza, di gettarmi fuori del suo dolcissimo seno (nel quale nato e nudrito fui sino al colmo della mia vita, e nel quale, con buona pace di quella, desidero con tutto il core di riposare l' animo stanco, e terminare il tempo che m' è dato); per le parti quasi tutte, alle quali questa lingua si stende, peregrino, quasi mendicando, sono andato, mostrando contro a mia voglia la piaga della fortuna, che suole ingiustamente al piagato molte volte essere imputata. Veramente io sono stato legno sanza vela e sanza governo, portato a diversi porti e foci e liti dal vento secco che vapora la dolorosa povertà; e sono vile apparito agli occhi a molti, che forse per alcuna fama in altra forma mi aveano immaginato; nel cospetto de' quali non solamente mia persona inviliò, ma di minor pregio si fece ogni opera, si già fatta, come quella che fosse a fare."—*Opere Minori*, ut sup. vol. ii. p. 20.

the original (in the note) is retained as given by Foscolo in the article on "Dante" in the *Edinburgh Review* (vol. xxx. No. 60); and I have retained also, with little difference, the translation which accompanies it:—

"From your letter, which I received with due respect and affection, I observe how much you have at heart my restoration to my country. I am bound to you the more gratefully, inasmuch as an exile rarely finds a friend. But after mature consideration, I must, by my answer, disappoint the wishes of some little minds; and I confide in the judgment to which your impartiality and prudence will lead you. Your nephew and mine has written to me, what indeed had been mentioned by many other friends, that, by a decree concerning the exiles, I am allowed to return to Florence, provided I pay a certain sum of money, and submit to the humiliation of asking and receiving absolution: wherein, my father, I see two propositions that are ridiculous and impertinent. I speak of the impertinence of those who mention such conditions to me; for in your letter, dictated by judgment and discretion, there is no such thing. Is such an invitation, then, to return to his country glorious to d. all. (Dante Allighieri), after suffering in exile almost fifteen years? Is it thus they would recompense innocence which all the world knows, and the labour and fatigue of unremitting study? Far from the man who is familiar with philosophy be the senseless baseness of a heart of earth, that could act like a little sciolist, and imitate the infamy of some others, by offering himself up as it were in chains: far from the man who cries aloud for justice, this

compromise by his money with his persecutors. No, my father, this is not the way that shall lead me back to my country. I will return with hasty steps, if you or any other can open to me a way that shall not derogate from the fame and honour of d. (Dante); but if by no such way Florence can be entered, then Florence I shall never enter. What! shall I not everywhere enjoy the light of the sun and stars? and may I not seek and contemplate, in every corner of the earth, under the canopy of heaven, consoling and delightful truth, without first rendering myself inglorious, nay infamous, to the people and republic of Florence? Bread, I hope, will not fail me."[1]

[1] "In licteris vestris et reverentia debita et affectione receptis, quam repatriatio mea cure sit vobis ex animo grata mente ac diligenti animaversione concepi, etenim tanto me districtius obligastis, quanto rarius exules invenire amicos contingit. ad illam vero significata respondeo: et si non eatenus qualiter forsam pusillanimitas appeteret aliquorum, ut sub examine vestri consilii ante judicium, affectuose deposco. ecce igitur quod per licteras vestri mei: que nepotis, necnon aliorum quamplurium amicorum significatum est mihi. per ordinamentum nuper factum Florentie super absolutione bannitorum. quod si solvere vellem certam pecunie quantitatem, vellemque pati notam oblationis et absolvi possem et redire ut presens. in quo quidem duo ridenda et male perconciliata sunt. Pater, dico male perconciliata per illos qui tali expresserunt: nam vestre litere discretius et consultius clausulate nicil de talibus continebant. estne ista revocatio gloriosa qua d. all. (i.e. *Dantes Alligherius*) revocatur ad patriam per trilustrium fere perpessus exilium? hecne meruit conscientia manifesta quibuslibet? hec sudor et labor continuatus in studiis? absit a viro philosophie domestica temeraria terreni cordis humilitas, ut more cujusdam cioli et aliorum infamiam quasi vinctus ipse se patiatur offerri. absit a viro predicante justitiam, ut perpessus injuriam inferentibus. velud benemerentibus, pecuniam suam solvat. non est hec via redeundi ad patriam, Pater mi, sed si alia per vos, aut

Had Dante's pride and indignation always vented themselves in this truly exalted manner, never could the admirers of his genius have refused him their sympathy; and never, I conceive, need he either have brought his exile upon him, or closed it as he did. To that close we have now come, and it is truly melancholy and mortifying. Failure in a negotiation with the Venetians for his patron, Guido Novello, is supposed to have been the last bitter drop which made the cup of his endurance run over. He returned from Venice to Ravenna, worn out, and there died, after fifteen years' absence from his country, in the year 1321, aged fifty-seven. His life had been so agitated, that it probably would not have lasted so long, but for the solace of his poetry, and the glory which he knew it must produce him. Guido gave him a sumptuous funeral, and intended to give him a monument; but such was the state of Italy in those times, that he himself died in exile the year after. The monument, however, and one of a noble sort, was subsequently bestowed by the father of Cardinal Bembo, in 1483; and another, still nobler, as late as 1780, by Cardinal Gonzaga. His countrymen, in after years, made two solemn applications for the removal of his dust to Florence; but the just pride of the Ravennese refused them.

Of the exile's family, three sons died young;

deinde per alios invenietur que fame d. (*Dantis*) que onori non deroget, illam non lentis passibus acceptabo. quod si per nullam talem Florentia introitur, nunquam Florentiam introibo. quidni? nonne solis astrorumque specula ubique conspiciam? nonne dulcissimas veritates potero speculari ubique sub celo, ni prius inglorium, imo ignominiosum populo, Florentineque civitati me reddam? quippe panis non deficiet."

the daughter went into a nunnery; and the two remaining brothers, who ultimately joined their father in his banishment, became respectable men of letters, and left families in Ravenna; where the race, though extinct in the male line, still survives through a daughter, in the noble house of Serego Alighieri. No direct descent of the other kind from poets of former times is, I believe, known to exist.

The manners and general appearance of Dante have been minutely recorded, and are in striking agreement with his character. Boccaccio and other novelists are the chief relaters; and their accounts will be received accordingly with the greater or less trust, as the reader considers them probable; but the author of the *Decameron* personally knew some of his friends and relations, and he intermingles his least favourable reports with expressions of undoubted reverence. The poet was of middle height, of slow and serious deportment, had a long dark visage, large piercing eyes, large jaws, an aquiline nose, a projecting under-lip, and thick curling hair — an aspect announcing determination and melancholy. There is a sketch of his countenance, in his younger days, from the immature but sweet pencil of Giotto; and it is a refreshment to look at it, though pride and discontent, I think, are discernible in its lineaments. It is idle, and no true compliment to his nature, to pretend, as his mere worshippers do, that his face owes all its subsequent gloom and exacerbation to external causes, and that he was in every respect the poor victim of events — the infant changed at nurse by the wicked. What came out of him, he must have had in him, at least in the

germ; and so inconsistent was his nature altogether, or, at any rate, such an epitome of all the graver passions that are capable of co-existing, both sweet and bitter, thoughtful and outrageous, that one is sometimes tempted to think he must have had an angel for one parent, and—I shall leave his own toleration to say what—for the other.

To continue the account of his manners and inclinations: He dressed with a becoming gravity; was temperate in his diet; a great student; seldom spoke, unless spoken to, but always to the purpose; and almost all the anecdotes recorded of him, except by himself, are full of pride and sarcasm. He was so swarthy, that a woman, as he was going by a door in Verona, is said to have pointed him out to another, with a remark which made the saturnine poet smile—"That is the man who goes to hell whenever he pleases, and brings back news of the people there." On which her companion observed—"Very likely; don't you see what a curly beard he has, and what a dark face? owing, I dare say, to the heat and smoke." He was evidently a passionate lover of painting and music—is thought to have been less strict in his conduct with regard to the sex than might be supposed from his platonical aspirations—(Boccaccio says, that even a goitre did not repel him from the pretty face of a mountaineer)—could be very social when he was young, as may be gathered from the sonnet addressed to his friend Cavalcante about a party for a boat—and though his poetry was so intense and weighty, the laudable minuteness of a biographer has informed us, that his handwriting, besides being neat and precise, was of a long and particularly thin character: "meagre" is his word.

There is a letter, said to be nearly coeval with his time, and to be written by the prior of a monastery to a celebrated Ghibelline leader, a friend of Dante's, which, though hitherto accounted apocryphal by most, has such an air of truth, and contains an image of the poet in his exile so exceedingly like what we conceive of the man, that it is difficult not to believe it genuine, especially as the handwriting has lately been discovered to be that of Boccaccio."[1] At all events, I am sure the reader will not be sorry to have the substance of it. The writer says, that he perceived one day a man coming into the monastery, whom none of its inmates knew. He asked him what he wanted; but the stranger saying nothing, and continuing to gaze on the building as though contemplating its architecture, the question was put a second time; upon which, looking round on his interrogators, he answered, "*Peace!*" The prior, whose curiosity was strongly excited, took the stranger apart, and discovering who he was, shewed him all the attention becoming his fame; and then Dante took a little book out of his bosom, and observing that perhaps the prior had not seen it, expressed a wish to leave it with his new friend as a memorial. It was "a portion," he said, "of his work." The prior received the volume with respect; and hastily opening it at once, and fixing his eyes on the contents, in order, it would seem, to shew the interest he took in it, appeared suddenly to check some observation which they suggested. Dante found that his reader was surprised at seeing the work written in the vulgar tongue instead of Latin. He explained, that he wished to address himself

[1] *Opere Minori*, ut sup. vol. iii. p. 186.

to readers of all classes; and concluded with requesting the prior to add some notes, with the spirit of which he furnished him, and then forward it (transcribed, I presume, by the monks) to their common friend, the Ghibelline chieftain—a commission, which, knowing the prior's intimacy with that personage, appears to have been the main object of his coming to the place.[1]

This letter has been adduced as an evidence of Dante's poem having transpired during his lifetime: a thing which, in the teeth of Boccaccio's statement to that effect, and indeed the poet's own testimony,[2] Foscolo holds to be so impossible, that he turns the evidence against the letter. He thinks, that if such bitter invectives had been circulated, a hundred daggers would have been sheathed in the bosom of the exasperating poet.[3] But I cannot help being of opinion, with some writer whom I am unable at present to call to mind (Schlegel, I think), that the strong critical reaction of modern times in favour of Dante's genius has tended to exaggerate the idea conceived of him in relation to his own. That he was of importance, and bitterly hated in his native city, was a distinction he shared with other partisans who have obtained no celebrity, th[illegible] his poetry, [illegible] must have increased [illegible]ness; hat his genius also became mo[illegible] ut of the city, by the few ina[illegible] estimating a man of letters in those se[illegible]

[1] *Veltro allegorico di Dante*, ut sup. p. 208, where the Appendix contains the Latin original.

[2] See Fraticelli's Dissertation on the *Convito*, in *Opere Minori*, ut sup. vol. ii. p. 560.

[3] *Discorso sul Testo*, p. 54.

times, may be regarded as certain; but that busy politicians in general, war-making statesmen, and princes constantly occupied in fighting for their existence with one another, were at all alive either to his merits or his invectives, or would have regarded him as anything but a poor wandering scholar, solacing his foolish interference in the politics of this world with the old clerical threats against his enemies in another, will hardly, I think, be doubted by any one who reflects on the difference between a fame accumulated by ages, and the living poverty that is obliged to seek its bread. A writer on a monkish subject may have acquired fame with monks, and even with a few distinguished persons, and yet have been little known, and less cared for, out of the pale of that very private literary public, which was almost exclusively their own. When we read, nowadays, of the great poet's being so politely received by Can Grande, lord of Verona, and sitting at his princely table, we are apt to fancy that nothing but his great poetry procured him the reception, and that nobody present competed with him in the eyes of his host. But, to say nothing of the different kinds of retainers that could sit at a prince's table in those days, Can, who was more ostentatious than delicate in his munificence, kept a sort of caravansera for clever exiles, whom he distributed into lodgings classified according to their pursuits;[1] and Dante only shared his bounty with the rest, till the more delicate poet could no longer endure either the buffoonery of his companions, or the amusement derived from it by the master. On

[1] *Balbo*, Naples edition, p. 132.

one occasion, his platter is slily heaped with their bones, which provokes him to call them dogs, as having none to shew for their own. Another time, Can Grande asks him how it is that his companions give more pleasure at court than himself; to which he answers, "Because like loves like." He then leaves the court, and his disgusted superiority is no doubt regarded as a pedantic assumption.

He stopped long nowhere, except with Guido Novello; and when that prince, whose downfall was at hand, sent him on the journey above mentioned to Venice, the senate (whom the poet had never offended) were so little aware of his being of consequence, that they declined giving him an audience. He went back, and broke his heart. Boccaccio says, that he would get into such passions with the very boys and girls in the street, who plagued him with party-words, as to throw stones at them—a thing that would be incredible, if persons acquainted with his great but ultra-sensitive nation did not know what Italians could do in all ages, from Dante's own age down to the times of Alfieri and Foscolo. It would be as difficult, from the evidence of his own works and of the exasperation he created, to doubt the extremest reports of his irascible temper, as it would be not to give implicit faith to his honesty. The charge of peculation which his enemies brought against this great poet, the world has universally scouted with an indignation that does it honour. He himself seems never to have condescended to allude to it; and a biographer would feel bound to copy his silence, had not the accusation been so atrociously recorded. But, on the other hand, who can believe that a

man so capable of doing his fellow-citizens good and honour, would have experienced such excessive enmity, had he not carried to excess the provocations of his pride and scorn? His whole history goes to prove it, not omitting the confession he makes of pride as his chief sin, and the eulogies he bestows on the favourite vice of the age—revenge. His Christianity (at least as shewn in his poem) was not that of Christ, but of a furious polemic. His motives for changing his party, though probably of a mixed nature, like those of most human beings, may reasonably be supposed to have originated in something better than interest or indignation. He had most likely not agreed thoroughly with any party, and had become hopeless of seeing dispute brought to an end, except by the representative of the Cæsars. The inconsistency of the personal characters of the popes with the sacred claims of the chair of St. Peter, was also calculated greatly to disgust him; but still his own infirmities of pride and vindictiveness spoiled all; and when he loaded everybody else with reproach for the misfortunes of his country, he should have recollected that, had his own faults been kept in subjection to his understanding, he might possibly have been its saviour. Dante's modesty has been asserted on the ground of his humbling himself to the fame of Virgil, and at the feet of blessed spirits; but this kind of exalted humility does not repay a man's fellow-citizens for lording it over them with scorn and derision. We learn from Boccaccio, that when he was asked to go ambassador from his party to the Pope, he put to them the following useless and mortifying queries—"If I go, who is to stay?—

—and if I stay, who is to go?"[1] Neither did his pride make him tolerant of pride in others. A neighbour applying for his intercession with a magistrate, who had summoned him for some offence, Dante, who disliked the man for riding in an overbearing manner along the streets (stretching out his legs as wide as he could, and hindering people from going by), did intercede with the magistrate, but it was in behalf of doubling the fine in consideration of the horsemanship. The neighbour, who was a man of family, was so exasperated, that Sacchetti the novelist says it was the principal cause of Dante's expatriation. This will be con-

[1] "Di se stesso presunse maravigliosamente tanto, che essendo egli glorioso nel colmo del reggimento della repubblica, e ragionandosi trà maggiori cittadini di mandare, per alcuna gran bisogna, ambasciata a Bonifazio papa VIII., e che principe della ambasciata fosse Dante, ed egli in ciò in presenzia di tutti quegli che ciò consigliavano richiesto, avvenne, che soprastando egli alla risposta, alcun disse, che pensi? alle quali parole egli rispose: penso, se io vo, chi rimane; e s' io rimango, chi va: quasi esso solo fosse colui che tra tutti valesse e per cui tutti gli altri valessero." And he goes on to say, respecting the stone-throwing: "Appresso, come che il nostro poeta nelle sua avversità paziente o no si fosse, in una fu impazientissimo: ed egli infino al cominciamento del suo esilio stato guelfissimo, non essendogli aperta la via del ritornare in casa sua, si fuor di modo diventò ghibellino, che ogni femminella, ogni picciol fanciullo, e quante volte avesse voluto, ragionando di parte, e la guelfa proponendo alla ghibellina, l'avrebbe non solamente fatto turbare, ma a tanta insania commosso, che se taciuto non fosse, a gittar le pietre l'avrebbe condotto" (*Vita di Dante*, prefixed to the Paris edition of the *Commedia*, 1844, p. xxv.). And then the "buon Boccaccio," with his accustomed sweetness of nature, begs pardon of so great a man, for being obliged to relate such things of him, and doubts whether his spirit may not be looking down on him that moment *disdainfully* from *heaven!* Such an association of ideas had Dante produced between the celestial and the scornful!

did not personally identify himself with a creed, or do his utmost to perpetuate the worst parts of it in behalf of a ferocious inquisitorial church, and to the risk of endangering the peace of millions of gentle minds.

The great poem thus misnomered is partly a system of theology, partly an abstract of the knowledge of the day, but chiefly a series of passionate and imaginative pictures, altogether forming an account of the author's times, his friends, his enemies, and himself, written to vent the spleen of his exile, and the rest of his feelings, good and bad, and to reform church and state by a spirit of resentment and obloquy, which highly needed reform itself. It has also a design strictly self-referential. The author feigns, that the beatified spirit of his mistress has obtained leave to warn and purify his soul by shewing him the state of things in the next world. She deputes the soul of his master Virgil to conduct him through hell and purgatory, and then takes him herself through the spheres of heaven, where Saint Peter catechises and confirms him, and where he is finally honoured with sights of the Virgin Mary, of Christ, and even a glimpse of the Supreme Being!

His hell, considered as a place, is, to speak geologically, a most fantastical formation. It descends from beneath Jerusalem to the centre of the earth, and is a funnel graduated in circles, each circle being a separate place of torment for a different vice or its co-ordinates, and the point of the funnel terminating with Satan stuck into ice. Purgatory is a corresponding mountain on the other side of the globe, commencing with the antipodes of Jerusalem, and divided into exterior circles

of expiation, which end in a tableland forming the terrestrial paradise. From this the hero and his mistress ascend by a flight, exquisitely conceived, to the stars; where the sun and the planets of the Ptolemaic system (for the true one was unknown in Dante's time) form a series of heavens for different virtues, the whole terminating in the empyrean, or region of pure light, and the presence of the Beatific Vision.

The boundaries of old and new, strange as it may now seem to us, were so confused in those days, and books were so rare, and the Latin poets held in such invincible reverence, that Dante, in one and the same poem, speaks of the false gods of Paganism, and yet retains much of its lower mythology; nay, invokes Apollo himself at the door of paradise. There was, perhaps, some mystical and even philosophical inclusion of the past in this medley, as recognising the constant superintendence of Providence; but that Dante partook of what may be called the literary superstition of the time, even for want of better knowledge, is clear from the grave historical use he makes of poetic fables in his treatise on Monarchy, and in the very arguments which he puts into the mouths of saints and apostles. There are lingering feelings to this effect even now among the peasantry of Italy; where, the reader need not be told, Pagan customs of all sorts, including religious and most reverend ones, are existing under the sanction of other names;—heathenisms christened. A Tuscan postilion, once enumerating to me some of the native poets, concluded his list with Apollo; and a plaster-cast man over here, in London, appeared much puzzled, when conversing on the subject with a

friend of mine, how to discriminate Samson from Hercules.

Dante accordingly, while, with the frightful bigotry of the schools, he puts the whole Pagan world into hell-borders (with the exception of two or three, whose salvation adds to the absurdity), mingles the hell of Virgil with that of Tertullian and St. Dominic; sets Minos at the door as judge; retains Charon in his old office of boatman over the Stygian lake; puts fabulous people with real among the damned, Dido, and Cacus, and Ephialtes, with Ezzelino and Pope Nicholas the Fifth; and associates the Centaurs and the Furies with the agents of diabolical torture. It has pleased him also to elevate Cato of Utica to the office of warder of purgatory, though the censor's poor good wife, Marcia, is detained in the regions below. By these and other far greater inconsistencies, the whole place of punishment becomes a *reductio ad absurdum*, as ridiculous as it is melancholy; so that one is astonished how so great a man, and especially a man who thought himself so far advanced beyond his age, and who possessed such powers of discerning the good and beautiful, could endure to let his mind live in so foul and foolish a region for any length of time, and there wreak and harden the unworthiest of his passions. Genius, nevertheless, is so commensurate with absurdity throughout the book, and there are even such sweet and balmy as well as sublime pictures in it occasionally, nay often, that not only will the poem ever be worthy of admiration, but when those increasing purifications of Christianity which our blessed reformers began, shall finally precipitate the whole dregs of the author into the myth-

ology to which they belong, the world will derive a pleasure from it to an amount not to be conceived till the arrival of that day. Dante, meantime, with an impartiality which has been admired by those who can approve the assumption of a theological tyranny at the expense of common feeling and decency, has put friends as well as foes into hell: tutors of his childhood, kinsmen of those who treated him hospitably, even the father of his beloved friend, Guido Cavalcante — the last for not believing in a God: therein doing the worst thing possible in behalf of the belief, and totally differing both with the pious heathen Plutarch, and the great Christian philosopher Bacon, who were of opinion that a contumelious belief is worse than none, and that it is far better and more pious to believe in "no God at all," than in a God who would "eat his children as soon as they were born." And Dante makes him do worse; for the whole unbaptized infant world, Christian as well as Pagan, is in his Tartarus.

Milton has spoken of the "milder shades of Purgatory"; and truly they possess great beauties. Even in a theological point of view they are something like a bit of Christian refreshment after the horrors of the *Inferno*. The first emerging from the hideous gulf to the sight of the blue serenity of heaven, is painted in a manner inexpressibly charming. So is the seashore with the coming of the angel; the valley, with the angels in green; the repose at night on the rocks; and twenty other pictures of gentleness and love. And yet, special and great has been the escape of the Protestant world from this part of Roman Catholic belief; for Purgatory is the heaviest stone that

hangs about the neck of the old and feeble in that communion. Hell is avoidable by repentance; but Purgatory, what modest conscience shall escape? Mr. Cary, in a note on a passage in which Dante recommends his readers to think on what follows this expiatory state, rather than what is suffered there,[1] looks upon the poet's injunction as an "unanswerable objection to the doctrine of purgatory," it being difficult to conceive "how the best can meet death without horror, if they believe it must be followed by immediate and intense suffering." Luckily, assent is not belief; and mankind's feelings are for the most part superior to their opinions; otherwise the world would have been in a bad way indeed, and nature not been vindicated of her children. But let us watch and be on our guard against all resuscitations of superstition.

As to our Florentine's Heaven, it is full of beauties also, though sometimes of a more questionable and pantomimical sort than is to be found in either of the other books. I shall speak of some of them presently; but the general impression of the place is, that it is no heaven at all. He says it is, and talks much of its smiles and its beatitude; but always excepting the poetry —especially the similes brought from the more heavenly earth—we realise little but a fantastical assemblage of doctors and doubtful characters, far more angry and theological than celestial; giddy raptures of monks and inquisitors dancing in circles, and saints denouncing popes and Florentines; in short, a heaven libelling itself with invectives against earth, and terminating in a great

[1] *The Vision; or, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, of Dante Alighieri*, &c., Smith's edition, 1844, p. 90.

presumption. Many of the people put there, a Calvinistic Dante would have consigned to the "other place"; and some, if now living, would not be admitted into decent society. At the beginning of one of the cantos, the poet congratulates himself, with a complacent superiority, on his being in heaven and occupied with celestial matters, while his poor fellow-creatures are wandering and blundering on earth. But he had never got there! A divine—worthy of that name—of the Church of England (Dr. Whichcote), has beautifully said, that "heaven is first a temper, and then a place." According to this truly celestial topography, the implacable Florentine had not reached its outermost court. Again, his heavenly mistress, Beatrice, besides being far too didactic to sustain the womanly part of her character properly, alternates her smiles and her sarcasms in a way that jars horribly against the occasional enchantment of her aspect. She does not scruple to burst into taunts of the Florentines in the presence of Jesus himself; and the spirit of his ancestor, Cacciaguida, in the very bosom of Christian bliss, promises him revenge on his enemies! Is this the kind of zeal that is to be exempt from objection in a man who objected to all the world? or will it be thought a profaneness against such profanity, to remind the reader of the philosopher in Swift, who "while gazing on the stars, was betrayed by his lower parts into a ditch!"

The reader's time need not be wasted with the allegorical and other mystical significations given to the poem; still less on the question whether Beatrice is theology, or a young lady, or both; and least of all on the discovery of the ingenious

Signor Rossetti, that Dante and all the other great old Italian writers meant nothing, either by their mistresses or their mythology, but attacks on the court of Rome. Suffice it, that besides all other possible meanings, Dante himself has told us that his poem has its obvious and literal meaning; that he means a spade by a spade, purgatory by purgatory, and truly and unaffectedly to devote his friends to the infernal regions whenever he does so. I confess I think it is a great pity that Guido Cavalcante did not live to read the poem, especially the passage about his father. The understanding of Guido, who had not the admiration for Virgil that Dante had (very likely for reasons that have been thought sound in modern times), was in all probability as good as that of his friend in many respects, and perhaps more so in one or two; and modern criticism might have been saved some of its pains of objection by the poet's contemporary.

The author did not live to publish, in any formal manner, his extraordinary poem, probably did not intend to do so, except under those circumstances of political triumph which he was always looking for; but as he shewed portions of it to his friends, it was no doubt talked of to a certain extent, and must have exasperated such of his enemies as considered him worth their hostility. No wonder they did all they could to keep him out of Florence. What would they have said of him, could they have written a counter poem? What would even his friends have said of him? for we see in what manner he has treated even those; and yet how could he possibly know, with respect either to friends or enemies, what passed between them and their consciences? or who was it that gave

him his right to generate the boasted distinction between an author's feelings as a man and his assumed office as a theologian, and parade the latter at the former's expense? His own spleen, hatred, and avowed sentiments of vengeance, are manifest throughout the poem; and there is this, indeed, to be said for the moral and religious inconsistencies both of the man and his verse, that in those violent times the spirit of Christian charity, and even the sentiment of personal shame, were so little understood, that the author in one part of it is made to blush by a friend for not having avenged him; and it is said to have been thought a compliment to put a lady herself into hell, that she might be talked of, provided it was for something not odious. An admirer of this infernal kind of celebrity, even in later times, declared that he would have given a sum of money (I forget to what amount) if Dante had but done as much for one of his ancestors. It has been argued, that in all the parties concerned in these curious ethics there is a generous love of distinction, and a strong craving after life, action, and sympathy of some kind or other. Granted; there are all sorts of half-good, half-barbarous feelings in Dante's poem. Let justice be done to the good half; but do not let us take the ferocity for wisdom and piety; or pretend, in the complacency of our own freedom from superstition, to see no danger of harm to the less fortunate among our fellow-creatures in the support it receives from a man of genius. Bedlams have been filled with such horrors; thousands, nay millions of feeble minds are suffering by them or from them, at this minute, all over the world. Dante's best critic,

Foscolo, has said much of the heroical nature of the age in which the poet lived; but he adds, that its mixture of knowledge and absurdity is almost inexplicable. The truth is, that like everything else which appears harsh and unaccountable in nature, it was an excess of the materials for good, working in an over-active and inexperienced manner; but knowing this, we are bound, for the sake of the good, not to retard its improvement by ignoring existing impieties, or blind ourselves to the perpetuating tendencies of the bigotries of great men. Oh! had the first indoctrinators of Christian feeling, while enlisting the "divine Plato" into the service of diviner charity, only kept the latter just enough in mind to discern the beautiful difference between the philosopher's unmalignant and improvable evil, and their own malignant and eternal one, what a world of folly and misery they might have saved us! But as the evil has happened, let us hope that even this form of it has had its uses. If Dante thought it salutary to the world to maintain a system of religious terror, the same charity which can hope that it may once have been so, has taught us how to commence a better. But did he, after all, or did he not, think it salutary? Did he think so, believing the creed himself? or did he think it from an unwilling sense of its necessity? Or, lastly, did he write only as a mythologist, and care for nothing but the exercise of his spleen and genius? If he had no other object than that, his conscientiousness would be reduced to a low pitch indeed. Foscolo is of opinion he was not only in earnest, but that he was very near taking himself for an apostle, and would have done so had his prophecies suc-

ceeded, perhaps with success to the pretension.[1] Thank heaven, his "Hell" has not embittered the mild reading-desks of the Church of England. If King George the Third himself, with all his arbitrary notions, and willing religious acquiescence, could not endure the creed of St. Athanasius with its damnatory enjoinments of the impossible, what would have been said to the inscription over Dante's hell-gate, or the account of Ugolino eating an archbishop, in the gentle chapels of Queen Victoria? May those chapels have every beauty in them, and every air of heaven, that painting and music can bestow—divine gifts, not unworthy to be set before their Divine Bestower; but far from them be kept the foul fiends of inhumanity and superstition!

It is certainly impossible to get at a thorough knowledge of the opinions of Dante even in theology; and his morals, if judged according to the received standard, are not seldom puzzling. He rarely thinks as the popes do; sometimes not as the Church does: he is lax, for instance, on the subject of absolution by the priest at death.[2] All you can be sure of is, the predominance of his will, the most wonderful poetry, and the notions he entertained of the degrees of vice and virtue. Towards the errors of love he is inclined to be so lenient (some think because he had indulged in them himself), that it is pretty clear he would not have put Paulo and Francesca into hell, if their story had not been too recent, and their death too sudden, to allow him to assume their repentance

[1] *Discorso sul Testo*, pp. 64, 77-90, 335-338.

[2] *Purgatorio*, canto iii. 118, 138; referred to by Foscolo, in the *Discorso sul Testo*, p. 383.

in the teeth of the evidence required. He avails himself of orthodox license to put "the harlot Rahab" into heaven ("cette bonne fille de Jéricho," as Ginguené calls her); nay, he puts her into the planet Venus, as if to compliment her on her profession; and one of her companions there is a fair Ghibelline, sister of the tyrant Ezzelino, a lady famous for her gallantries, of whom the poet good-naturedly says, that she "was overcome by her star"—to wit, the said planet Venus; and yet he makes her the organ of the most unfeminine triumphs over the Guelphs. But both these ladies, it is to be understood, repented—for they had time for repentance; their good fortune saved them. Poor murdered Francesca had no time to repent; therefore her mischance was her damnation! Such are the compliments theology pays to the Creator. In fact, nothing is really punished in Dante's Catholic hell but impenitence, deliberate or accidental. No delay of repentance, however dangerous, hinders the most hard-hearted villain from reaching his heaven. The best man goes to hell for ever, if he does not think he has sinned as Dante thinks; the worst is beatified, if he agrees with him: the only thing which everybody is sure of, is some dreadful duration of agony in purgatory —the great horror of Catholic deathbeds. Protestantism may well hug itself on having escaped it// O Luther! vast was the good you did us. O gentle Church of England! let nothing persuade you that it is better to preach frightful and foolish ideas of God from your pulpits, than loving-kindness to all men, and peace above all things.

If Dante had erred only on the side of indulgence, humanity could easily have forgiven him—

for the excesses of charity are the extensions of hope; but, unfortunately, where he is sweet-natured once, he is bitter a hundred times. This is the impression he makes on universalists of all creeds and parties; that is to say, on men who having run the whole round of sympathy with their fellow-creatures, become the only final judges of sovereign pretension. It is very well for individuals to make a god of Dante for some encouragement of their own position or pretension; but a god for the world at large he never was, or can be; and I doubt if an impression to this effect was not always, from the very dawn of our literature, the one entertained of him by the genius of our native country, which could never long endure any kind of unwarrantable dictation. Chaucer evidently thought him a man who would spare no unnecessary probe to the feelings (see the close of his version of *Ugolino*). Spenser says not a word of him, though he copied Tasso, and eulogised Ariosto. Shakspeare would assuredly have put him into the list of those presumptuous lookers into eternity who "*take upon themselves to know*" (*Cymbeline*, act v. sc. 4). Milton, in his sonnet to Henry Lawes, calls him "that sad Florentine"—a lamenting epithet, by which we do not designate a man whom we desire to resemble. The historian of English poetry, admirably applying to him a passage out of Milton, says that

"Hell grows darker at his frown."[1]

Walter Scott could not read him, at least not with

[1] Warton's *History of English Poetry*, edition of 1840, vol. iii. p. 214.

pleasure. He tells Miss Seward that the "plan" of the poem appeared to him "unhappy; the personal malignity and strange mode of revenge presumptuous and uninteresting."[1] Uninteresting, I think, it is impossible to consider it. The known world is there, and the unknown pretends to be there; and both are surely interesting to most people.

Landor, in his delightful book the *Pentameron* —a book full of the profoundest as well as sweetest humanity — makes Petrarch follow up Boccaccio's eulogies of the episode of Paulo and Francesca with ebullitions of surprise and horror:

"*Petrarca.* Perfection of poetry! The greater is my wonder at discovering nothing else of the same order or cast in this whole section of the poem. He who fainted at the recital of Francesca,

'And he who fell as a dead body falls,'

would exterminate all the inhabitants of every town in Italy! What execrations against Florence, Pistoia, Pisa, Siena, Genoa! what hatred against the whole human race! what exultation and merriment at eternal and immitigable sufferings! Seeing this, I cannot but consider the *Inferno* as the most immoral and impious book that ever was written. Yet, hopeless that our country shall ever see again such poetry, and certain that without it our future poets would be more feebly urged forward to excellence, I would have dissuaded Dante from cancelling it, if this had been his intention."[2]

[1] *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, vol. ii. p. 122.

[2] *Pentameron and Pentalogia*, pp. 44–50.

Most happily is the distinction here intimated between the undesirableness of Dante's book in a moral and religious point of view, and the greater desirableness of it, nevertheless, as a pattern of poetry; for absurdity, however potent, wears itself out in the end, and leaves what is good and beautiful to vindicate even so foul an origin.

Again, Petrarch says, "What an object of sadness and of consternation, he who rises up from hell like a giant refreshed!

"*Boccaccio.* Strange perversion! A pillar of smoke by day and of fire by night, to guide no one. Paradise had fewer wants for him to satisfy than hell had, all which he fed to repletion; but let us rather look to his poetry than his temper."

See also what is said in that admirable book further on (p. 50), respecting the most impious and absurd passage in all Dante's poem, the assumption about Divine Love in the inscription over hell-gate—one of those monstrosities of conception which none ever had the effrontery to pretend to vindicate, except theologians who profess to be superior to the priests of Moloch, and who yet defy every feeling of decency and humanity for the purpose of explaining their own worldly, frightened, or hard-hearted submission to the mistakes of the most wretched understandings.

Ugo Foscolo, an excellent critic where his own temper and violence did not interfere, sees nothing but jealousy in Petrarch's dislike of Dante, and nothing but Jesuitism in similar feelings entertained by such men as Tiraboschi. But all gentle and considerate hearts must dislike the rage and bigotry in Dante, even were it true (as the

Dantesque Foscolo thinks) that Italy will never be regenerated till one-half of it is baptized in the blood of the other![1] Such men, with all their acuteness, are incapable of seeing what can be effected by nobler and serener times, and the progress of civilisation. They fancy, no doubt, that they are vindicating the energies of Nature herself, and the inevitable necessity of "doing evil that good may come." But Dante in so doing violated the Scripture he professed to revere; and men must not assume to themselves that final knowledge of results, which is the only warrant of the privilege, and the possession of which is to be arrogated by no earthly wisdom. One calm discovery of science may do away with all the boasted eternal necessities of the angry and the self-idolatrous. The passions that may be necessary to savages are not bound to remain so to civilised men, any more than the eating of man's flesh or the worship of Juggernaut. When we think of the wonderful things lately done by science for the intercourse of the world, and the beautiful and tranquil books of philosophy written by men of equal energy and benevolence, and opening the peacefulest hopes for mankind, and views of creation to which Dante's universe was a nutshell,—such a vision as that of his poem (in a theological point of view) seems no better than the dream of an hypochondriacal savage, and his nutshell a rottenness to be spit out of the mouth.

Heaven send that the great poet's want of charity has not made myself presumptuous and unchari-

[1] *Discorso sul Testo*, p. 226. The whole passage (sect. cx.) is very eloquent, horrible, and *self-betraying*.

table! But it is in the name of society I speak; and words, at all events, nowadays are not the terrible, stake-preceding things they were in his. Readers in general, however—even those of the literary world—have little conception of the extent to which Dante carries either his cruelty or his abuse. The former (of which I shall give some examples presently) shews appalling habits of personal resentment; the latter is outrageous to a pitch of the ludicrous—positively screaming. I will give some specimens of it out of Foscolo himself, who collects them for a different purpose; though, with all his idolatry of Dante, he was far from being insensible to his mistakes.

"The people of Siena," according to this national and Christian poet, were "a parcel of coxcombs; those of Arezzo, dogs; and of Casentino, hogs. Lucca made a trade of perjury. Pistoia was a den of beasts, and ought to be reduced to ashes; and the river Arno should overflow and drown every soul in Pisa. Almost all the women in Florence walked half-naked in public, and were abandoned in private. Every brother, husband, son, and father, in Bologna, set their women to sale. In all Lombardy were not to be found three men who were not rascals; and in Genoa and Romagna people went about pretending to be men, but in reality were bodies inhabited by devils, their souls having gone to the 'lowest pit of hell' to join the betrayers of their friends and kinsmen."[1]

So much for his beloved countrymen. As for foreigners, particularly kings, "Edward the First of England, and Robert of Scotland, were a

[1] *Discorso*, as above, p. 101.

couple of grasping fools; the Emperor Albert was an usurper; Alphonso the Second, of Spain, a debauchee; the King of Bohemia a coward; Frederick of Arragon a coward and miser; the Kings of Portugal and Norway forgers; the King of Naples a man whose virtues were expressed by a unit, and his vices by a million; and the King of France, the descendant of a Paris butcher, and of progenitors who poisoned St. Thomas Aquinas, their descendants conquering with the arms of Judas rather than of soldiers, and selling the flesh of their daughters to old men, in order to extricate themselves from a danger."[1]

When we add to these invectives, damnations of friends as well as foes, of companions, lawyers, men of letters, princes, philosophers, popes, pagans, innocent people as well as guilty, fools and wise, capable and incapable, men, women, and children, —it is really no better than a kind of diabolical sublimation of Lord Thurlow's anathemas in the *Rolliad*, which begins with

"Damnation seize ye all";

and ends with

"Damn them beyond what mortal tongue can tell,
Confound, sink, plunge them all to deepest blackest hell."[2]

In the gross, indeed, this is ridiculous enough. No burlesque can beat it. But in the particular, one is astonished and saddened at the cruelties in which the poet allows his imagination to riot: horrors generally described with too intense a

[1] *Discorso*, p. 103.
[2] *Criticisms on the Rolliad, and Probationary Odes for the Laureateship*, third edit. 1785, p. 317.

verisimilitude not to excite our admiration, with too astounding a perseverance not to amaze our humanity, and sometimes with an amount of positive joy and delight that makes us ready to shut the book with disgust and indignation. Thus, in a circle in hell, where traitors are stuck up to their chins in ice (canto xxxii.), the visitor, in walking about, happens to give one of their faces a kick; the sufferer weeps, and then curses him—with such infernal truth does the writer combine the malignant with the pathetic! Dante replies to the curse by asking the man his name. He is refused it. He then seizes the miserable wretch by the hair, in order to force him to the disclosure; and Virgil is represented as commending the barbarity![1] But he does worse. To barbarity he adds treachery of his own. He tells another poor wretch, whose face is iced up with his tears, as if he had worn a crystal vizor, that if he will disclose his name and offence, he will relieve his eyes awhile, *that he may weep*. The man does so; and the ferocious poet then refuses to perform his promise, adding mockery to falsehood, and observing that ill manners are the only courtesy proper towards such a fellow![2] It has been conjectured, that Macchiavelli apparently encouraged the enormities of the princes of his time, with a design to expose them to indignation. It might have been thought of Dante, if he had not taken a part in

[1] The writer of the article on Dante in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* (as above) concedes that his hero in this passage becomes "*almost* cruel." Almost! Tormenting a man further, who is up to his chin in everlasting ice, and whose face he has kicked!

[2] "Cortesia fu lui esser villano."
—*Inferno*, canto xxxiii. 150.

the cruelty, that he detailed the horrors of his hell out of a wish to disgust the world with its frightful notions of God. This is certainly the effect of the worst part of his descriptions in an age like the present. Black burning gulfs, full of outcries and blasphemy, feet red-hot with fire, men eternally eating their fellow-creatures, frozen wretches malignantly dashing their iced heads against one another, other adversaries mutually exchanging shapes by force of an attraction at once irresistible and loathing, and spitting with hate and disgust when it is done — Enough, enough, for God's sake! Take the disgust out of one's senses, O flower of true Christian wisdom and charity, now beginning to fill the air with fragrance!

But it will be said that Dante did all this out of his hate of cruelty itself, and of treachery itself. Partly no doubt he did; and entirely he thought he did. But see how the notions of such retribution react upon the judge, and produce in him the bad passions he punishes. It is true the punishments are imaginary. Were a human being actually to see such things, he must be dehumanised or he would cry out against them with horror and detestation. But the poem draws them as truths; the writer's creed threatened them; he himself contributed to maintain the belief; and however we may suppose such a belief to have had its use in giving alarm to ruffian passions and barbarously ignorant times, an age arrives when a beneficent Providence permits itself to be better understood, and dissipates the superfluous horror.

Many, indeed, of the absurdities of Dante's poem are too obvious nowadays to need remark. Even the composition of the poem, egotistically

said to be faultless by such critics as Alfieri, who thought they resembled him, partakes, as everybody's style does, of the faults as well as good qualities of the man. It is nervous, concise, full almost as it can hold, picturesque, mighty, primeval; but it is often obscure, often harsh, and forced in its constructions, defective in melody, and wilful and superfluous in the rhyme. Sometimes, also, the writer is inconsistent in circumstance (probably from not having corrected the poem); and he is not above being filthy. Even in the episode of Paulo and Francesca, which has so often been pronounced faultless, and which is unquestionably one of the most beautiful pieces of writing in the world, some of these faults are observable, particularly in the obscurity of the passage about *tolta forma*, the cessation of the incessant tempest, and the non-adjuration of the two lovers in the manner that Virgil prescribes.

But truly it is said, that when Dante is great, nobody surpasses him. I doubt if anybody equals him, as to the constant intensity and incessant variety of his pictures; and whatever he paints, he throws, as it were, upon its own powers; as though an artist should draw figures that started into life, and proceeded to action for themselves, frightening their creator. Every motion, word, and look of these creatures becomes full of sensibility and suggestions. The invisible is at the back of the visible; darkness becomes palpable; silence describes a character, nay, forms the most striking part of a story; a word acts as a flash of lightning, which displays some gloomy neighbourhood, where a tower is standing, with dreadful faces at the window; or where, at your feet, full of eternal

voices, one abyss is beheld dropping out of another in the lurid light of torment. In the present volume a story will be found which tells a long tragedy in half-a-dozen lines. Dante has the minute probabilities of a Defoe in the midst of the loftiest and most generalising poetry; and this feeling of matter-of-fact is impressed by fictions the most improbable, nay, the most ridiculous and revolting. You laugh at the absurdity; you are shocked at the detestable cruelty; yet, for the moment, the thing almost seems as if it must be true. You feel as you do in a dream, and after it;—you wake and laugh, but the absurdity seemed true at the time; and while you laugh you shudder.

Enough of this crueller part of his genius has been exhibited; but it is seldom you can have the genius without sadness. In the circle of hell, soothsayers walk along weeping, with their faces turned the wrong way, so that their tears fall between their shoulders. The picture is still more dreadful. Warton thinks it ridiculous. But I cannot help feeling with the poet, that it is dreadfully pathetic. It is the last mortifying insult to human pretension. Warton, who has a grudge against Dante natural to a man of happier piety, thinks him ridiculous also in describing the monster Geryon lying upon the edge of one of the gulfs of hell "like a beaver" (canto xvii.). He is of opinion that the writer only does it to shew his knowledge of natural history. But surely the idea of so strange and awful a creature (a huge mild-faced man ending in a dragon's body) lying familiarly on the edge of the gulf, as a beaver does by the water, combines the supernatural with the familiar in a very impressive manner. It is this

combination of extremes which is the life and soul of the whole poem; you have this world in the next; the same persons, passions, remembrances, intensified by superhuman despairs or beatitudes; the speechless entrancements of bliss, the purgatorial trials of hope and patience; the supports of hate and anger (such as they are) in hell itself; nay, of loving despairs, and a self-pity made unboundedly pathetic by endless suffering. Hence there is no love-story so affecting as that of Paulo and Francesca thus told and perpetuated in another world; no father's misery so enforced upon us as Ugolino's, who, for hundreds of years, has not grown tired of the revenge to which it wrought him. Dante even puts this weight and continuity of feeling into passages of mere transient emotion or illustration, unconnected with the next world; as in the famous instance of the verses about evening, and many others which the reader will meet with in this volume. Indeed, if pathos and the most impressive simplicity, and graceful beauty of all kinds, and abundant grandeur, can pay (as the reader, I believe, will think it does even in a prose abstract), for the pangs of moral discord and absurdity inflicted by the perusal of Dante's poem, it may challenge competition with any in point of interest. His Heaven, it is true, though containing both sublime and lovely passages, is not so good as his Earth. The more unearthly he tried to make it, the less heavenly it became. When he is content with earth in heaven itself,—when he literalises a metaphor, and with exquisite felicity finds himself *arrived there* in consequence of fixing his eyes on the eyes of Beatrice, then he is most celestial. But his

endeavours to express degrees of beatitude and holiness by varieties of flame and light,—of dancing lights, revolving lights, lights of smiles, of stars, of starry crosses, of didactic letters and sentences, of animal figures made up of stars full of blessed souls, with saints *forming an eagle's beak* and David in its *eye !*—such superhuman attempts become for the most part tricks of theatrical machinery, on which we gaze with little curiosity and no respect.

His angels, however, are another matter. Belief was prepared for those winged human forms, and they furnished him with some of his most beautiful combinations of the natural with the supernatural. Ginguené has remarked the singular variety as well as beauty of Dante's angels. Milton's, indeed, are commonplace in the comparison. In the eighth canto of the *Inferno*, the devils insolently refuse the poet and his guide an entrance into the city of Dis :—an angel comes sweeping over the Stygian lake to enforce it ; the noise of his wings makes the shores tremble, and is like a crashing whirlwind such as beats down the trees and sends the peasants and their herds flying before it. The heavenly messenger, after rebuking the devils, touches the portals of the city with his wand ; they fly open ; and he returns the way he came without uttering a word to the two companions. His face was that of one occupied with other thoughts. This angel is announced by a tempest. Another, who brings the souls of the departed to Purgatory, is first discovered at a distance, gradually disclosing white splendours, which are his wings and garments. He comes in a boat, of which his wings are the sails ; and as he approaches, it is impossible to look him in the face for its bright-

ness. Two other angels have green wings and green garments, and the drapery is kept in motion like a flag by the vehement action of the wings. A fifth has a face like the morning star, casting forth quivering beams. A sixth is of a lustre so oppressive, that the poet feels a weight on his eyes before he knows what is coming. Another's presence affects the senses like the fragrance of a May-morning; and another is in garments dark as cinders, but has a sword in his hand too sparkling to be gazed at. Dante's occasional pictures of the beauties of external nature are worthy of these angelic creations, and to the last degree fresh and lovely. You long to bathe your eyes, smarting with the fumes of hell, in his dews. You gaze enchanted on his green fields and his celestial blue skies, the more so from the pain and sorrow in midst of which the visions are created.

Dante's grandeur of every kind is proportionate to that of his angels, almost to his ferocity; and that is saying everything. It is not always the spiritual grandeur of Milton, the subjection of the material impression to the moral; but it is equally such when he chooses, and far more abundant. His infernal precipices—his black whirlwinds—his innumerable cries and claspings of hands—his very odours of huge loathsomeness—his giants at twilight standing up to the middle in pits, like towers, and causing earthquakes when they move—his earthquake of the mountain in Purgatory, when a spirit is set free for heaven—his dignified Mantuan Sordello, silently regarding him and his guide as they go by, "like a lion on his watch"—his blasphemer, Capaneus, lying in unconquered rage and sullenness under an eternal rain

of flakes of fire (human precursor of Milton's Satan)—his aspect of Paradise, "as if the universe had smiled"—his inhabitants of the whole planet Saturn crying out *so loud*, in accordance with the anti-papal indignation of Saint Pietro Damiano, that the poet, though among them, *could not hear what they said*—and the blushing eclipse, like red clouds at sunset, which takes place at the apostle Peter's denunciation of the sanguinary filth of the court of Rome—all these sublimities, and many more, make us not know whether to be more astonished at the greatness of the poet or the raging littleness of the man. Grievous is it to be forced to bring two such opposites together; and I wish, for the honour and glory of poetry, I did not feel compelled to do so. But the swarthy Florentine had not the healthy temperament of his brethren, and he fell upon evil times. Compared with Homer and Shakspeare, his very intensity seems only superior to theirs from an excess of the morbid; and he is inferior to both in other sovereign qualities of poetry—to the one, in giving you the healthiest general impression of nature itself—to Shakspeare, in boundless universality—to most great poets, in thorough harmony and delightfulness. He wanted (generally speaking) the music of a happy and a happy-making disposition. Homer, from his large vital bosom, breathes like a broad fresh air over the world, amidst alternate storm and sunshine, making you aware that there is rough work to be faced, but also activity and beauty to be enjoyed. The feeling of health and strength is predominant. Life laughs at death itself, or meets it with a noble confidence—is not taught to dread it as a

malignant goblin. Shakspeare has all the smiles as well as tears of nature, and discerns the "soul of goodness in things evil." He is comedy as well as tragedy — the entire man in all his qualities, moods, and experiences; and he beautifies all. And both those truly divine poets make nature their subject through her own inspiriting medium —not through the darkened glass of one man's spleen and resentment. Dante, in constituting himself the hero of his poem, not only renders her, in the general impression, as dreary as himself, in spite of the occasional beautiful pictures he draws of her, but narrows her very immensity into his pettiness. He fancied, alas, that he could build her universe over again out of the politics of old Rome and the divinity of the schools!

Dante, besides his great poem, and a few Latin eclogues of no great value, wrote lyrics full of Platonical sentiment, some of which anticipated the loveliest of Petrarch's; and he was the author of various prose works, political and philosophical, all more or less masterly for the time in which he lived, and all coadjutors of his poetry in fixing his native tongue. His account of his Early Life (the *Vita Nuova*) is a most engaging history of a boyish passion, evidently as real and true on his own side as love and truth can be, whatever might be its mistake as to its object. The treatise on the Vernacular Tongue (*de Vulgari Eloquio*) shews how critically he considered his materials for impressing the world, and what a reader he was of every production of his contemporaries. The Banquet (*Convito*) is but an abstruse commentary on some of his minor poems; but the book on Monarchy (*de Monarchia*) is a compound of ability

and absurdity, in which his great genius is fairly overborne by the barbarous pedantry of the age. It is an argument to prove that the world must all be governed by one man; that this one man must be the successor of the Roman Emperor—God having manifestly designed the world to be subject for ever to the Roman empire; and lastly, that this Emperor is equally designed by God to be independent of the Pope—spiritually subject to him, indeed, but so far only as a good son is subject to the religious advice of his father; and thus making Church and State happy for ever in the two divided supremacies. And all this assumption of the obsolete and impossible the author gravely proves in all the forms of logic, by arguments drawn from the history of Æneas, and the providential cackle of the Roman geese!

How can the patriots of modern Italy, justified as they are in extolling the poet to the skies, see him plunge into such depths of bigotry in his verse and childishness in his prose, and consent to perplex the friends of advancement with making a type of their success out of so erring though so great a man? Such slavishness, even to such greatness, is a poor and unpromising thing, compared with an altogether unprejudiced and forward-looking self-reliance. To have no faith in names has been announced as one of their principles; and "God and Humanity" is their motto. What, therefore, has Dante's name to do with their principles? or what have the semi-barbarisms of the thirteenth century to do with the final triumph of "God and Humanity"? Dante's lauded wish for that union of the Italian States, which his fame has led them so fondly to identify with their

own, was but a portion of his greater and prouder wish to see the whole world at the feet of his boasted ancestress, Rome. Not, of course, that he had no view to what he considered good and just government (for what sane despot purposes to rule without that?); but his good and just government was always to be founded on the *sine quâ non* principle of universal Italian domination.[1]

All that Dante said or did has its interest for us in spite of his errors, because he was an earnest and suffering man and a great genius; but his fame must ever continue to lie where his greatest blame does, in his principal work. He was a gratuitous logician, a preposterous politician, a cruel theologian; but his wonderful imagination, and (considering the bitterness that was in him) still more wonderful sweetness, have gone into the hearts of his fellow-creatures, and will remain there in spite of the moral and religious absurdities with which they are mingled, and of the inability which the best-natured readers feel to associate his entire memory, as a poet, with their usual personal delight in a poet and his name.

[1] Everybody sees this who is not wilfully blind. "Passionate," says the editor of the *Opere Minori*, "for the ancient Italian glories, and the greatness of the Roman name, he was of opinion that it was only by means of combined strength, and one common government, that Italy could be finally secured from discord in its own bosom and enemies from without, *and recover its ancient empire over the whole world.*" "Amantissimo delle antiche glorie Italiane, e della grandezza del nome romano, ei considerava, che soltanto pel mezzo d' una general forza ed autorità poteva l' Italia dalle interne contese e dalle straniere invasioni restarsi sicura, *e recuperare l'antico imperio sopra tutte le genti.*"—Ut sup. vol. iii. p. 8.

THE DIVINE COMEDY

THE STORY OF THE POEM

I

THE JOURNEY THROUGH HELL

ARGUMENT

THE infernal regions, according to Dante, are situate in the globe we inhabit, directly beneath Jerusalem, and consist of a succession of gulfs or circles, narrowing as they descend, and terminating in the centre; so that the general shape is that of a funnel. Commentators have differed as to their magnitude; but the latest calculation gives 315 miles for the diameter of the mouth or crater, and a quarter of a mile for that of its terminating point. In the middle is the abyss, pervading the whole depth, and 245 miles in diameter at the opening; which reduces the different platforms, or territories that surround it, to a size comparatively small. These territories are more or less varied with land and water, lakes, precipices, &c. A precipice, fourteen miles high, divides the first of them from the second. The passages from the upper world to the entrance are various; and the descents from one circle to another are effected by the poet and his guide in different manners—sometimes on foot through byways, sometimes by the conveyance of supernatural beings. The crater he finds to be the abode of those who have done neither good nor evil, caring for nothing but themselves. In the first circle are the whole unbaptized world—heathens and infants—melancholy, though not tormented. Here also is found the Elysium of Virgil, whose Charon and other infernal beings are among the agents of torment. In the second circle the torments commence with the sin of incontinence; and the punish-

ment goes deepening with the crime from circle to circle, through gluttony, avarice, prodigality, wrath, sullenness, or unwillingness to be pleased with the creation, disbelief in God and the soul (with which the punishment by fire commences), usury, murder, suicide, blasphemy, seduction and other carnal enormities, adulation, simony, soothsaying, astrology, witchcraft, trafficking with the public interest, hypocrisy, highway robbery (on the great Italian scale), sacrilege, evil counsel, disturbance of the Church, heresy, false apostleship, alchemy, forgery, coining (all these, from seduction downwards, in one circle); then, in the frozen or lowest circle of all, treachery; and at the bottom of this is Satan, stuck into the centre of the earth.

With the centre of the globe commences the antipodean attraction of its opposite side, together with a rocky ascent out of it, through a huge ravine. The poet and his guide, on their arrival at this spot, accordingly find their position reversed; and so conclude their *downward* journey *upwards*, till they issue forth to light on the borders of the sea which contains the island of Purgatory.

ANTE says, that when he was half-way on his pilgrimage through this life, he one day found himself, towards nightfall, in a wood where he could not no longer discern the right path. It was a place so gloomy and terrible, everything in it growing in such a strange and savage manner, that the horror he felt returned on him whenever he thought of it. The pass of death could hardly be more bitter. Travelling through it all night with a beating heart, he at length came to the foot of a hill, and looking up, as he began to ascend it, he perceived the shoulders of the hill clad in the beams of morning; a sight which gave him some little comfort. He felt like a man who has buffeted his way to land out of a shipwreck, and who, though still anxious to get farther from

his peril, cannot help turning round to gaze on the wide waters. So did he stand looking back on the pass that contained that dreadful wood.

After resting a while, he again betook him up the hill; but had not gone far when he beheld a leopard bounding in front of him, and hindering his progress. After the leopard came a lion, with his head aloft, mad with hunger, and seeming to frighten the very air;[1] and after the lion, more eager still, a she-wolf, so lean that she appeared to be sharpened with every wolfish want. The pilgrim fled back in terror to the wood, where he again found himself in a darkness to which the light never penetrated. In that place, he said, the sun never spoke word.[2] But the wolf was still close upon him.[3]

While thus flying, he beheld coming towards him a man, who spoke something, but he knew not what. The voice sounded strange and feeble, as if from disuse. Dante loudly called out to him to save him, whether he was a man or only a spirit. The apparition, at whose sight the wild

1 "Parea che l' aer ne temesse."

2 "Là dove 'l sol tace."

"The sun to me is dark,
And *silent* is the moon,
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave."—*Milton.*

3 There is great difference among the commentators respecting the meaning of the three beasts; some supposing them passions, others political troubles, others personal enemies, &c. The point is not of much importance, especially as a mystery was intended; but nobody, as Mr. Cary says, can doubt that the passage was suggested by one in the prophet Jeremiah, v. 6: "Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them; a leopard shall watch over their cities."

beasts disappeared, said that he was no longer man, though man he had been in the time of the false gods, and sung the history of the offspring of Anchises.

"And art thou, then, that Virgil," said Dante, "who has filled the world with such floods of eloquence? O glory and light of all poets, thou art my master, and thou mine *author;* thou alone the book from which I have gathered beauties that have gained me praise. Behold the peril I am in, and help me, for I tremble in every vein and pulse."

Virgil comforted Dante. He told him that he must quit the wood by another road, and that he himself would be his guide, leading him first to behold the regions of woe underground, and then the spirits that lived content in fire because it purified them for heaven; and then that he would consign him to other hands worthier than his own, which should raise him to behold heaven itself; for as the Pagans, of whom he was one, had been rebels to the law of him that reigns there, nobody could arrive at Paradise by their means.[1]

[1] "Che quello 'mperador che là su regna
Perch' i fu' ribellante a la sua legge,
Non vuol che 'n sua città per me si vegna."

The Pagans could not be rebels to a law they never heard of, any more than Dante could be a rebel to Luther. But this is one of the absurdities with which the impious effrontery or scarcely less impious admissions of Dante's teachers avowedly set reason at defiance,—retaining, meanwhile, their right of contempt for the impieties of Mahometans and Brahmins; "which is odd," as the poet says; for being not less absurd, or, as the others argued, much more so, they had at least an equal claim on the submission of the reason; since the greater the irrationality, the higher the theological triumph.

So saying, Virgil moved on his way, and Dante closely followed. He expressed a fear, however, as they went, lest being "neither Æneas nor St. Paul," his journey could not be worthily undertaken, nor end in wisdom. But Virgil, after sharply rebuking him for his faintheartedness, told him, that the spirit of her whom he loved, Beatrice, had come down from heaven on purpose to commend her lover to his care; upon which the drooping courage of the pilgrim was raised to an undaunted confidence; as flowers that have been closed and bowed down by frosty nights, rise all up on their stems in the morning sun.[1]

"Through me is the road to the dolorous city;
Through me is the road to the everlasting sorrows;
Through me is the road to the lost people.
Justice was the motive of my exalted maker;
I was made by divine power, by consummate wisdom, and by primal love;
Before me was no created thing, if not eternal; and eternal am I also.
Abandon hope, all ye who enter."

Such were the words which Dante beheld written in dark characters over a portal. "Master," said he to Virgil, "I find their meaning hard."

"A man," answered Virgil, "must conduct himself at this door like one prepared. Hither must he bring no mistrust. Hither can come and live no cowardice. We have arrived at the place I

1 "Quale i fioretti dal notturno gelo
Chinati e chiusi, poi che 'l sol gl' imbianca,
Si drizzan tutti aperti in loro stelo."

Like as the flowers that with the frosty night
Are bowed and closed, soon as the sun returns,
Rise on their stems, all open and upright.

told thee of. Here thou art to behold the dolorous people who have lost all intellectual good."[1]

So saying, Virgil placed his hand on Dante's, looking on him with a cheerful countenance; and the Florentine passed with him through the dreadful gate.

They entered upon a sightless gulf, in which was a black air without stars; and immediately heard a hubbub of groans, and wailings, and terrible things said in many languages, words of wretchedness, outcries of rage, voices loud and hoarse, and sounds of the smitings of hands one against another. Dante began to weep. The sound was as if the sand in a whirlwind were turned into noises, and filled the blind air with incessant conflict.

Yet these were not the souls of the wicked. They were those only who had lived without praise or blame, thinking of nothing but themselves. These miserable creatures were mixed with the

[1] This loss of intellectual good, and the confession of the poet that he finds the inscription over hell-portal hard to understand (*il senso lor m' è duro*), are among the passages in Dante which lead some critics to suppose that his hell is nothing but an allegory, intended at once to imply his own disbelief in it as understood by the vulgar part of mankind, and his employment of it, nevertheless, as a salutary check both to the foolish and the reflecting;—to the foolish, as an alarm; and to the reflecting, as a parable. It is possible, in the teeth of many appearances to the contrary, that such may have been the case; but in the doubt that it affects either the foolish or the wise to any good purpose, and in the certainty that such doctrines do a world of mischief to tender consciences and the cause of sound piety, such monstrous contradictions, in terms, of every sense of justice and charity which God has implanted in the heart of man, are not to be passed over without indignant comment.

angels who stood neutral in the war with Satan. Heaven would not dull its brightness with those angels, nor would lower hell receive them, lest the bad ones should triumph in their company.

"And what is it," said Dante, "which makes them so grievously suffer?"

"Hopelessness of death," said Virgil. "Their blind existence here, and immemorable former life, make them so wretched, that they envy every other lot. Mercy and justice alike disdain them. Let us speak of them no more. Look, and pass."

The companions went on till they came to a great river with a multitude waiting on the banks. A hoary old man appeared crossing the river towards them in a boat; and as he came, he said, "Woe to the wicked. Never expect to see heaven. I come to bear you across to the dark regions of everlasting fire and ice." Then looking at Dante, he said, "Get thee away from the dead, thou who standest there, live spirit."

"Torment thyself not, Charon," said Virgil. "He has a passport beyond thy power to question."

The shaggy cheeks of the boatman of the livid lake, who had wheels of fire about his eyes, fell at these words; and he was silent. But the naked multitude of souls whom he had spoken to changed colour, and gnashed their teeth, blaspheming God, and their parents, and the human species, and the place, and the hour, and the seed of the sowing of their birth; and all the while they felt themselves driven onwards, by a fear which became a desire, towards the cruel riverside, which awaits every one destitute of the fear of God. The demon Charon, beckoning to them with eyes like braziers, collected

them as they came, giving blows to those that lingered, with his oar. One by one they dropped into the boat like leaves from a bough in autumn, till the bough is left bare; or as birds drop into the decoy at the sound of the bird-call.

There was then an earthquake, so terrible that the recollection of it made the poet burst into a sweat at every pore. A whirlwind issued from the lamenting ground, attended by vermilion flashes; and he lost his senses, and fell like a man stupefied.

A crash of thunder through his brain woke up the pilgrim so hastily, that he shook himself like a person roused by force. He found that he was on the brink of a gulf, from which ascended a thunderous sound of innumerable groanings. He could see nothing down it. It was too dark with sooty clouds. Virgil himself turned pale, but said, "We are to go down here. I will lead the way."

"O master," said Dante, "if even thou fearest, what is to become of myself?"

"It is pity, not fear," replied Virgil, "that makes me change colour."

With these words his guide led him into the first circle of hell, surrounding the abyss. The great noise gradually ceased to be heard, as they journeyed inwards, till at last they became aware of a world of sighs, which produced a trembling in the air. They were breathed by the souls of such as had died without baptism, men, women, and infants; no matter how good; no matter if they worshipped God before the coming of Christ, for they worshipped him not "properly." Virgil himself was one of them. They were all lost for no

other reason; and their "only suffering" consisted in "hopeless desire"!

Dante was struck with great sorrow when he heard this, knowing how many good men must be in that place. He inquired if no one had ever been taken out of it into heaven. Virgil told him there had, and he named them; to wit, Adam, Abel, Noah, Moses, King David, obedient Abraham the patriarch, and Isaac, and Jacob, with their children. and Rachel for whom Jacob did so much,—and "many more"; adding, however, that there was no instance of salvation before theirs.

Journeying on through spirits as thick as leaves, Dante perceived a lustre at a little distance, and observing shapes in it evidently of great dignity, inquired who they were that thus lived apart from the rest. Virgil said that heaven thus favoured them by reason of their renown on earth. A voice was then heard exclaiming, "Honour and glory to the lofty poet! Lo, his shade returns." Dante then saw four other noble figures coming towards them, of aspect neither sad nor cheerful.

"Observe him with the sword in his hand," said Virgil, as they were advancing. "That is Homer, the poets' sovereign. Next to him comes Horace the satirist; then Ovid; and the last is Lucan."

"And thus I beheld," says Dante, "the bright school of the loftiest of poets, who flies above the rest like an eagle."

For a while the illustrious spirits talked together, and then turned to the Florentine with a benign salutation, at which his master smiled: and "further honour they did me," adds the father of Italian poetry, "for they admitted me of their tribe; so

that to a band of that high account I added a sixth."[1]

The spirits returned towards the bright light in which they lived, talking with Dante by the way, and brought him to a magnificent castle, girt with seven lofty walls, and further defended with a river, which they all passed as if it had been dry ground. Seven gates conducted them into a meadow of fresh green, the resort of a race whose eyes moved with a deliberate soberness, and whose whole aspects were of great authority, their voices sweet, and their speech seldom.[2] Dante was taken apart to an elevation in the ground, so that he could behold them all distinctly; and there, on the "enamelled green,"[3] were pointed out to him the great spirits, by the sight of whom he felt exalted in his own esteem. He saw Electra with many companions, among whom were Hector and Æneas, and Cæsar in armour with his hawk's eyes; and on another side he beheld old King Latinus with his daughter Lavinia, and the Brutus that expelled Tarquin, and Lucretia, and Julia, and Cato's wife Marcia, and the mother of the Gracchi, and, apart by himself, the Sultan Saladin. He then raised his eyes a little, and beheld the "master of those who know"[4] (Aristotle), sitting amidst the family of philosophers,

[1] It is seldom that a boast of this kind—not, it must be owned, bashful—has been allowed by posterity to be just; nay, in four out of the five instances, below its claims.

[2] "Genti v' eran, con occhi tardi e gravi,
Di grande autorità ne' lor sembianti:
Parlavan rado, con voci soavi."

[3] "Sopra 'l verde smalto." Mr. Cary has noticed the appearance, for the first time, of this beautiful but now commonplace image.

[4] "Il maestro di color che sanno."

and honoured by them all. Socrates and Plato were at his side. Among the rest was Democritus, who made the world a chance, and Diogenes, and Heraclitus, &c., and Dioscorides, the good gatherer of simples. Orpheus also he saw, and Cicero, and the moral Seneca, and Euclid, and Hippocrates, and Avicen, and Averroes, who wrote the great commentary, and others too numerous to mention. The company of six became diminished to two, and Virgil took him forth on a far different road, leaving that serene air for a stormy one; and so they descended again into darkness.

It was the second circle into which they now came—a sphere narrower than the first, and by so much more the wretcheder. Minos sat at the entrance, gnarling — he that gives sentence on every one that comes, and intimates the circle into which each is to be plunged by the number of folds into which he casts his tail round about him. Minos admonished Dante to beware how he entered unbidden, and warned him against his conductor; but Virgil sharply rebuked the judge, and bade him not set his will against the will that was power.

The pilgrims then descended through hell-mouth, till they came to a place dark as pitch, that bellowed with furious cross-winds, like a sea in a tempest. It was the first place of torment, and the habitation of carnal sinners. The winds, full of stifled voices, buffeted the souls for ever, whirling them away to and fro, and dashing them against one another. Whenever it seized them for that purpose, the wailing and the shrieking was loudest, crying out against the Divine Power. Sometimes a whole multitude came driven in a

body like starlings before the wind, now hither and thither, now up, now down; sometimes they went in a line like cranes, when a company of those birds is beheld sailing along in the air, uttering its dolorous clangs.

Dante, seeing a group of them advancing, inquired of Virgil who they were. "Who are these," said he, "coming hither, scourged in the blackest part of the hurricane?"

"She at the head of them," said Virgil, "was empress over many nations. So foul grew her heart with lust, that she ordained license to be law, to the end that herself might be held blameless. She is Semiramis, of whom it is said that she gave suck to Ninus, and espoused him. Leading the multitude next to her is Dido, she that slew herself for love, and broke faith to the ashes of Sichæus; and she that follows with the next is the luxurious woman, Cleopatra."

Dante then saw Helen, who produced such a world of misery; and the great Achilles, who fought for love till it slew him; and Paris; and Tristan; and a thousand more whom his guide pointed at, naming their names, every one of whom was lost through love.

The poet stood for a while speechless for pity, and like one bereft of his wits. He then besought leave to speak to a particular couple who went side by side, and who appeared to be borne before the wind with speed lighter than the rest. His conductor bade him wait till they came nigher, and then to entreat them gently by the love which bore them in that manner, and they would stop and speak with him. Dante waited his time, and then lifted up his voice between the gusts of wind,

and adjured the two "weary souls" to halt and have speech with him, if none forbade their doing so; upon which they came to him, like doves to the nest.[1]

There was a lull in the tempest, as if on purpose to let them speak; and the female addressed Dante, saying, that as he shewed such pity for their state, they would have prayed heaven to give peace and repose to his life, had they possessed the friendship of heaven.[2]

"Love," she said, "which is soon kindled in a gentle heart, seized this my companion for the fair body I once inhabited—how deprived of it, my

[1] This is the famous episode of Paulo and Francesca. She was daughter to Count Guido da Polenta, lord of Ravenna, and wife to Giovanni Malatesta, one of the sons of the lord of Rimini. Paulo was her brother-in-law. They were surprised together by the husband, and slain on the spot. The following is the original passage:—

"Quali colombe, dal disio chiamate,
Con l' ali aperte e ferme, a dolce nido
Volan per l' aer dal voler portate:

Cotali uscir de la schiera ov' è Dido,
A noi venendo per l' aer maligno,
Si forte fu l' affettuoso grido."

As doves, drawn home from where they circled still,
Set firm their open wings, and through the air
Come sweeping, wafted by their pure good-will:

So broke from Dido's flock that gentle pair,
Cleaving, to where we stood, the air malign,
Such strength to bring them had a loving prayer.

[2] Francesca is to be conceived telling her story in anxious intermitting sentences—now all tenderness for her lover, now angry at their slayer; watching the poet's face, to see what he thinks, and at times averting her own. I take this excellent direction from Ugo Foscolo.

spirit is bowed to recollect. Love, which compels the beloved person upon thoughts of love, seized me in turn with a delight in his passion so strong, that, as thou seest, even here it forsakes me not. Love brought us both to one end. The punishment of Cain awaits him that slew us."

The poet was struck dumb by this story. He hung down his head, and stood looking on the ground so long, that his guide asked him what was in his mind. "Alas!" answered he, "such then was this love, so full of sweet thoughts; and such the pass to which it brought them! Oh, Francesca!" he cried, turning again to the sad couple, "thy sufferings make me weep. But tell me, I pray thee, what was it that first made thee know, for a certainty, that his love was returned?—that thou couldst refuse him thine no longer?"

"There is not a greater sorrow," answered she, "than calling to mind happy moments in the midst of wretchedness.[1] But since thy desire is so great to know our story to the root, hear me tell it as well as I may for tears. It chanced, one day, that we sat reading the tale of Sir Launcelot, how love took him in thrall. We were alone, and had no suspicion. Often, as we read, our eyes became suspended,[2] and we changed colour; but one

1 "Nessun maggior dolore,
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Ne la miseria."

2 "Per più fiate gli occhi ci sospinse
Quella lettura."

"To look at one another," says Boccaccio; and his interpretation has been followed by Cary and Foscolo; but, with deference to such authorities, I beg leave to think that the poet meant no more than he says, namely, that their eyes

passage alone it was that overcame us. When we read how Genevra smiled, and how the lover, out of the depth of his love, could not help kissing that smile, he that is never more to be parted from me kissed me himself on the mouth, all in a tremble. Never had we go-between but that book. The writer was the betrayer. That day we read no more."

While these words were being uttered by one of the spirits, the other wailed so bitterly, that the poet thought he should have died for pity. His senses forsook him, and he fell flat on the ground, as a dead body falls.[1]

were simply "suspended"—hung, as it were, over the book, without being able to read on; which is what I intended to express (if I may allude to a production of which both those critics were pleased to speak well), when, in my youthful attempt to enlarge this story, I wrote

> "And o'er the book they hung, and nothing said,
> And every lingering page grew longer as they read."
> —*Story of Rimini.*

[1] "Mentre che l' uno spirto questo disse,
L' altro piangeva sì, che di pietade
I' venni men così com' io morisse,
E caddi come corpo morto cade."

This last line has been greatly admired for the corresponding deadness of its expression.

> While thus one spoke, the other spirit mourn'd
> With wail so woful, that at his remorse
> I felt as though I should have died. I turn'd
> Stone-stiff; and to the ground, fell like a corse.

The poet fell thus on the ground (some of the commentators think) because he had sinned in the same way; and if Foscolo's opinion could be established—that the incident of the book is invention—their conclusion would receive curious collateral evidence, the circumstance of the perusal of the

On regaining his senses, the poet found himself in the third circle of hell, a place of everlasting wet, darkness, and cold, one heavy slush of hail and mud, emitting a squalid smell. The triple-headed dog Cerberus, with red eyes and greasy black beard, large belly, and hands with claws, barked above the heads of the wretches who floundered in the mud, tearing, skinning, and dismembering them, as they turned their sore and soddened bodies from side to side. When he saw the two living men, he shewed his fangs, and shook in every limb for desire of their flesh. Virgil threw lumps of dirt into his mouth, and so they passed him.

It was the place of Gluttons. The travellers passed over them, as if they had been ground to walk upon. But one of them sat up, and addressed the Florentine as his acquaintance. Dante did not know him, for the agony in his countenance. He was a man nicknamed Hog (Ciacco), and by no other name does the poet, or any one else, mention him. His countryman addressed him by it, though declaring at the same time that he wept to see him. Hog prophesied evil to his discordant native city, adding that there were but two just men in it—all the rest being given up to avarice, envy, and pride. Dante inquired by name respecting the fate of five other Florentines, *who had done good*, and was informed that they were all, for

romance in company with a lady being likely enough to have occurred to Dante. But the same probability applies in the case of the lovers. The reading of such books was equally the taste of their own times; and nothing is more likely than the volume's having been found in the room where they perished.

various offences, *in lower gulfs of hell.* Hog then beggèd that he would mention having seen him when he returned to the sweet world; and so, looking at him a little, bent his head, and disappeared among his blinded companions.

"Satan! hoa, Satan!" roared the demon Plutus, as the poets were descending into the fourth circle.

"Peace!" cried Virgil, "with thy swollen lip, thou accursed wolf. No one can hinder his coming down. God wills it."[1]

Flat fell Plutus, collapsed, like the sails of a vessel when the mast is split.

This circle was the most populous one they had yet come to. The sufferers, gifted with supernatural might, kept eternally rolling round it, one against another, with terrific violence, and so dashing apart, and returning. "Why grasp?" cried the one—"Why throw away?" cried the other; and thus exclaiming, they dashed furiously together.

They were the Avaricious and the Prodigal. Multitudes of them were churchmen, including cardinals and popes. Not all the gold beneath the moon could have purchased them a moment's rest. Dante asked if none of them were to be recognised by their countenances. Virgil said, "No"; for the stupid and sullied lives which they

[1] Plutus's exclamation about Satan is a great choke-pear to the commentators. The line in the original is

"Pape Satan, pape Satan aleppe."

The words, as thus written, are not Italian. It is not the business of this abstract to discuss such points, and therefore I content myself with believing that the context implies a call of alarm on the Prince of Hell at the sight of the living creature and his guide.

led on earth swept their faces away from all distinction for ever.

In discoursing of fortune, they descend by the side of a torrent, black as ink, into the fifth circle, or place of torment for the Angry, the Sullen, and the Proud. Here they first beheld a filthy marsh, full of dirty naked bodies, that in everlasting rage tore one another to pieces. In a quieter division of the pool were seen nothing but bubbles, carried by the ascent, from its slimy bottom, of the stifled words of the sullen. They were always saying, "We were sad and dark within us in the midst of the sweet sunshine, and now we live sadly in the dark bogs." The poets walked on till they came to the foot of a tower, which hung out two blazing signals to another just discernible in the distance. A boat came rapidly towards them, ferried by the wrathful Phlegyas;[1] who cried out, "Aha, felon! and so thou hast come at last!"

"Thou errest," said Virgil. "We come for no longer time than it will take thee to ferry us across thy pool."

Phlegyas looked like one defrauded of his right; but proceeded to convey them. During their course a spirit rose out of the mire, looking Dante in the face, and said, "Who art thou, that comest before thy time?"

[1] Phlegyas, a son of Mars, was cast into hell by Apollo for setting the god's temple on fire in resentment for the violation of his daughter Coronis. The actions of gods were not to be questioned, in Dante's opinion, even though the gods turned out to be false. Jugghanaut is as good as any, while he lasts. It is an ethico-theological puzzle, involving very nice questions; but at any rate, had our poet been a Brahmin of Benares, we know how he would have written about it in Sanscrit.

"Who art thou?" said Dante.

"Thou seest who I am," answered the other; "one among the mourners."

"Then mourn still, and howl, accursed spirit," returned the Florentine. "I know thee,—all over filth as thou art."

The wretch in fury laid hold of the boat, but Virgil thrust him back, exclaiming, "Down with thee! down among the other dogs!"

Then turning to Dante, he embraced and kissed him, saying, "O soul, that knows how to disdain, blessed be she that bore thee! Arrogant, truly, upon earth was this sinner, nor is his memory graced by a single virtue. Hence the furiousness of his spirit now. How many kings are there at this moment lording it as gods, who shall wallow here, as he does, like swine in the mud, and be thought no better of by the world!"

"I should like to see him smothering in it," said Dante, "before we go."

"A right wish," said Virgil, "and thou shalt, to thy heart's content."

On a sudden the wretch's muddy companions seized and drenched him so horribly that (exclaims Dante) "I laud and thank God for it now at this moment."

"Have at him!" cried they; "have at Filippo Argenti;" and the wild fool of a Florentine dashed his teeth for rage into his own flesh.[1]

[1] Filippo Argenti (Philip *Silver*—so called from his shoeing his horse with the precious metal) was a Florentine remarkable for bodily strength and extreme irascibility. What a barbarous strength and confusion of ideas is there in this whole passage about him! Arrogance punished by arrogance, a Christian mother blessed for the unchristian disdainfulness of her son, revenge boasted of and enjoyed,

The poet's attention was now drawn off by a noise of lamentation, and he perceived that he was approaching the city of Dis.[1] The turrets glowed vermilion with the fire within it, the walls appeared to be of iron, and moats were round about them. The boat circuited the walls till the travellers came to a gate, which Phlegyas, with a loud voice, told them to quit the boat and enter. But a thousand fallen angels crowded over the top of the gate, refusing to open it, and making furious gestures. At length they agreed to let Virgil speak with them inside; and he left Dante for a while, standing in terror without. The parley was in vain. They would not let them pass. Virgil, however, bade his companion be of good cheer, and then stood listening and talking to himself; disclosing by his words his expectation of some extraordinary assistance, and at the same time his anxiety for its arrival. On a sudden, three raging figures arose over the gate, coloured with gore.

passion arguing in a circle! Filippo himself might have written it. Dante says,

"Con piangere e con lutto
Spirito maladetto, ti rimani.—
Via costà con gli altri cani," &c.

Then Virgil, kissing and embracing him,

"Alma sdegnosa
Benedetta colei che 'n te s' incinse," &c.

And Dante again,

"Maestro, molto sarei vago
Di vederlo attuffare in questa broda," &c.

[1] Dis, one of the Pagan names of Pluto, here used for Satan. Within the walls of the city of Dis commence the punishments by fire.

Green hydras twisted about them; and their fierce temples had snakes instead of hair.

"Look," said Virgil. "The Furies! The one on the left is Megæra; Alecto is she that is wailing on the right; and in the middle is Tisiphone." Virgil then hushed. The Furies stood clawing their breasts, smiting their hands together, and raising such hideous cries, that Dante clung to his friend.

"Bring the Gorgon's head!" cried the Furies, looking down; "turn him to adamant!"

"Turn round," said Virgil, "and hide thy face; for if thou beholdest the Gorgon, never again wilt thou see the light of day." And with these words he seized Dante and turned him round himself, clapping his hands over his companion's eyes.

And now was heard coming over the water a terrible crashing noise, that made the banks on either side of it tremble. It was like a hurricane which comes roaring through the vain shelter of the woods, splitting and hurling away the boughs, sweeping along proudly in a huge cloud of dust, and making herds and herdsmen fly before it. "Now stretch your eyesight across the water," said Virgil, letting loose his hands;—"there, where the smoke of the foam is thickest." Dante looked; and saw a thousand of the rebel angels, like frogs before a serpent, swept away into a heap before the coming of a single spirit, who flew over the tops of the billows with unwet feet. The spirit frequently pushed the gross air from before his face, as if tired of the base obstacle; and as he came nearer, Dante, who saw it was a messenger from heaven, looked anxiously at Virgil. Virgil motioned him to be silent and bow down.

The angel, with a face full of scorn, as soon as he arrived at the gate, touched it with a wand that he had in his hand, and it flew open.

"Outcasts of heaven," said he; "despicable race! whence this fantastical arrogance? Do ye forget that your torments are laid on thicker every time ye kick against the Fates? Do ye forget how your Cerberus was bound and chained till he lost the hair off his neck like a common dog?"

So saying he turned swiftly and departed the way he came, not addressing a word to the travellers. His countenance had suddenly a look of some other business, totally different from the one he had terminated.

The companions passed in, and beheld a place full of tombs red-hot. It was the region of Arch-heretics and their followers. Dante and his guide passed round betwixt the walls and the sepulchres as in a churchyard, and came to the quarter which held Epicurus and his sect, who denied the existence of spirit apart from matter. The lids of the tombs remaining unclosed till the day of judgment, the soul of a noble Florentine, Farinata degli Uberti, hearing Dante speak, addressed him as a countryman, asking him to stop.[1] Dante, alarmed, beheld him rise half out of his sepulchre, looking as lofty as if he scorned hell itself. Finding who Dante was, he boasted of having three times expelled the Guelphs. "Perhaps so," said the poet; "but they came back again each time; an art which their enemies have not yet acquired."

[1] Farinata was a Ghibelline leader before the time of Dante, and had vanquished the poet's connexions at the battle of Montaperto.

A visage then appeared from out another tomb, looking eagerly, as if it expected to see some one else. Being disappointed, the tears came into its eyes, and the sufferer said, "If it is thy genius that conducts thee hither, where is my son, and why is he not with thee?"

"It is not my genius that conducts me," said Dante, "but that of one, whom perhaps thy son held in contempt."

"How sayest thou?" cried the shade;—"*held* in contempt? He is dead then? He beholds no longer the sweet light?" And with these words he dropped into his tomb, and was seen no more. It was Cavalcante Cavalcanti, the father of the poet's friend, Guido.[1]

The shade of Farinata, who had meantime been looking on, now replied to the taunt of Dante, prophesying that he should soon have good reason to know that the art he spoke of *had* been acquired; upon which Dante, speaking with more considerateness to the lofty sufferer, requested to know how the gift of prophecy could belong to spirits who were ignorant of the time present. Farinata answered that so it was; just as there was a kind of eyesight which could discern things at a distance though not at hand. Dante then expressed his remorse at not having informed Cavalcante that his son was alive. He said it was owing to his being overwhelmed with thought on the subject

[1] What would Guido have said to this? More, I suspect, than Dante would have liked to hear, or known how to answer. But he died before the verses transpired; probably before they were written; for Dante, in the chronology of his poem, assumes what times and seasons he finds most convenient.

he had just mentioned, and entreated Farinata to tell him so.

Quitting this part of the cemetery, Virgil led him through the midst of it towards a descent into a valley, from which there ascended a loathsome odour. They stood behind one of the tombs for a while, to accustom themselves to the breath of it; and then began to descend a wild fissure in a rock, near the mouth of which lay the infamy of Crete, the Minotaur. The monster beholding them gnawed himself for rage; and on their persisting to advance, began plunging like a bull when he is stricken by the knife of the butcher. They succeeded, however, in entering the fissure before he recovered sufficiently from his madness to run at them; and at the foot of the descent, came to a river of boiling blood, on the strand of which ran thousands of Centaurs armed with bows and arrows. In the blood, more or less deep according to the amount of the crime, and shrieking as they boiled, were the souls of the Inflicters of Violence; and if any of them emerged from it higher than he had a right to do, the Centaurs drove him down with their arrows. Nessus, the one that bequeathed Hercules the poisoned garment, came galloping towards the pilgrims, bending his bow, and calling out from a distance to know who they were; but Virgil, disdaining his hasty character, would explain himself only to Chiron, the Centaur who instructed Achilles. Chiron, in consequence, bade Nessus accompany them along the river; and there they saw tyrants immersed up to the eyebrows;—Alexander the Great among them, Dionysius of Syracuse, and Ezzelino the Paduan. There was

one of the Pazzi of Florence, and Rinieri of Corneto (infestors of the public ways), now shedding bloody tears, and Attila the Scourge, and Pyrrhus king of Epirus. Further on, among those immersed up to the throat, was Guy de Montfort the Englishman, who slew his father's slayer, Prince Henry, during divine service, in the bosom of God; and then by degrees the river became shallower and shallower till it covered only the feet; and here the Centaur quitted the pilgrims, and they crossed over into a forest.

The forest was a trackless and dreadful forest—the leaves not green, but black—the boughs not freely growing, but knotted and twisted—the fruit no fruit, but thorny poison. The Harpies wailed among the trees, occasionally shewing their human faces; and on every side of him Dante heard lamenting human voices, but could see no one from whom they came. "Pluck one of the boughs," said Virgil. Dante did so; and blood and a cry followed it.

"Why pluckest thou me?" said the trunk. "Men have we been, like thyself; but thou couldst not use us worse, had we been serpents." The blood and words came out together, as a green bough hisses and spits in the fire.

The voice was that of Piero delle Vigne, the good chancellor of the Emperor Frederick the Second. Just though he had been to others, he was thus tormented for having been unjust to himself; for, envy having wronged him to his sovereign, who sentenced him to lose his eyes, he dashed his brains out against a wall. Piero entreated Dante to vindicate his memory. The poet could not speak for pity; so Virgil made

the promise for him, inquiring at the same time in what manner it was that Suicides became thus identified with trees, and how their souls were to rejoin their bodies at the day of judgment. Piero said, that the moment the fierce self-murderer's spirit tore itself from the body, and passed before Charon, it fell, like a grain of corn, into that wood, and so grew into a tree. The Harpies then fed on its leaves, causing both pain and a vent for lamentation. The body it would never again enter, having thus cast away itself, but it would finally drag the body down to it by a violent attraction; and every suicide's carcass will be hung upon the thorn of its wretched shade.

The naked souls of two men, whose profusion had brought them to a violent end, here came running through the wood from the fangs of black female mastiffs—leaving that of a suicide to mourn the havoc which their passage had made of his tree. He begged his countryman to gather his leaves up, and lay them at the foot of his trunk, and Dante did so; and then he and Virgil proceeded on their journey.

They issued from the wood on a barren sand, flaming hot, on which multitudes of naked souls lay down, or sat huddled up, or restlessly walked about, trying to throw from them incessant flakes of fire, which came down like a fall of snow. They were the souls of the Impious. Among them was a great spirit, who lay scornfully submitting himself to the fiery shower, as though it had not yet ripened him.[1] Overhearing Dante

[1] "Sì che la pioggia non par che 'l maturi."

This is one of the grandest passages in Dante. It was probably (as English commentators have observed) in Milton's recollection when he conceived the character of Satan.

ask his guide who he was, he answered for himself, and said, "The same dead as living. Jove will tire his flames out before they conquer me."

"Capaneus," exclaimed Virgil, "thy pride is thy punishment. No martyrdom were sufficient for thee, equal to thine own rage." The besieger of Thebes made no reply.

In another quarter of the fiery shower the pilgrims met a crowd of Florentines, mostly churchmen, whose offence is not to be named; after which they beheld Usurers; and then arrived at a huge waterfall, which fell into the eighth circle, or that of the Fraudulent. Here Virgil, by way of bait to the monster Geryon, or Fraud, let down over the side of the waterfall the cord of St. Francis, which Dante wore about his waist,[1] and presently the dreadful creature came up, and sate on the margin of the fall, with his serpent's tail hanging behind him in the air, after the manner of a beaver; but the point of the tail was occasionally seen glancing upwards. He was a gigantic reptile, with the face of a just man, very mild. He had shaggy claws for arms, and a body variegated all over with colours that ran in knots and circles, each within the other, richer than any Eastern drapery. Virgil spoke apart to him, and then mounted on his back, bidding his com-

[1] The satire of friarly hypocrisy is at least as fine as Ariosto's discovery of Discord in a monastery.

The monster Geryon, son of Chrysaor (*Golden-sword*), and the Ocean-nymph Callirhoe (*Fair-flowing*), was rich in the possession of sheep. His wealth, and perhaps his derivatives, rendered him this instrument of satire. The monstrosity, the mild face, the glancing point of venom, and the beautiful skin, make it as fine as can be.

panion, who was speechless for terror, do the same. Geryon pushed back with them from the edge of the precipice, like a ship leaving harbour; and then, turning about, wheeled, like a sullen successless falcon, slowly down through the air in many a circuit. Dante would not have known that he was going downward, but for the air that struck upwards on his face. Presently they heard the crash of the waterfall on the circle below, and then distinguished flaming fires and the noises of suffering. The monster Geryon, ever sullen as the falcon who seats himself at a distance from his dissatisfied master, shook his riders from off his back to the water's side, and then shot away like an arrow.

This eighth circle of hell is called Evil-Budget,[1] and consists of ten compartments, or gulfs of torment, crossed and connected with one another by bridges of flint. In the first were beheld Pimps and Seducers, scourged like children by horned devils; in the second, Flatterers, begrimed with ordure; in the third, Simonists, who were stuck

[1] "*Malebolge*," literally Evil-Budget. *Bolgia* is an old form of the modern *baule*, the common term for a valise or portmanteau. "Bolgia" (says the *Vocabolario della Crusca, compendiato*, Ven. 1792), "a valise; Latin, bulga, hippopera; Greek, ἱπποπήρα. In reference to valises which open lengthways like a chest, Dante uses the word to signify those compartments which he feigns in his Hell." (Per similitudine di quelle valigie, che s' aprono per lo lungo, a guisa di cassa, significa quegli spartimenti, che Dante finge nell' Inferno.) The reader will think of the homely figurative names in Bunyan, and the contempt which great and awful states of mind have for conventional notions of rank in phraseology. It is a part, if well considered, of their grandeur.

like plugs into circular apertures, with their heads downwards, and their legs only discernible, the soles of their feet glowing with a fire which made them incessantly quiver. Dante, going down the side of the gulf with Virgil, was allowed to address one of them who seemed in greater agony than the rest; and, doing so, the sufferer cried out in a malignant rapture, "Aha, is it thou that standest there, Boniface?[1] Thou hast come sooner than it was prophesied." It was the soul of Pope Nicholas the Third that spoke. Dante undeceived and then sternly rebuked him for his avarice and depravity, telling him that nothing but reverence for the keys of St. Peter hindered him from using harsher words, and that it was such as he that the Evangelist beheld in the vision, when he saw the woman with seven heads and ten horns, who committed whoredom with the kings of the earth.

"O Constantine!" exclaimed the poet, "of what a world of evil was that dowry the mother, which first converted the pastor of the church into a rich man!"[2] The feet of the guilty pope spun with fiercer agony at these words; and Virgil, looking pleased on Dante, returned with him the way he came, till they found themselves on the margin of the fourth gulf, the habitation of the souls of False Prophets.

It was a valley, in which the souls came walking

[1] Boniface the Eighth was the pope then living, and one of the causes of Dante's exile. It is thus the poet contrives to put his enemies in hell before their time.

[2] An allusion to the pretended gift of the Lateran by Constantine to Pope Sylvester, ridiculed so strongly by Ariosto and others.

along, silent and weeping, at the pace of choristers who chant litanies. Their faces were turned the wrong way, so that the backs of their heads came foremost, and their tears fell on their loins. Dante was so overcome at the sight, that he leant against a rock and wept; but Virgil rebuked him, telling him that no pity at all was the only pity fit for that place.[1] There was Amphiaraus, whom the earth opened and swallowed up at Thebes; and Tiresias, who was transformed from sex to sex; and Aruns, who lived in a cavern on the side of the marble mountains of Carrara, looking out on the stars and ocean; and Mantò, daughter of Tiresias (her hind tresses over her bosom), who wandered through the world till she came and lived in the solitary fen, whence afterwards arose the city of Mantua; and Michael Scot, the magician, with his slender loins![2] and Eurypylus, the Grecian augur, who gave the signal with Calchas at Troy when to cut away the cables for home. He came

[1] A truly infernal sentiment. The original is,

"Qui vive la pietà quand' è ben morta."

Here pity lives when it is quite dead.

"Chi è più scellarato," continues the poet, "di colui,

Ch' al giudicio divin passion porta."

That is: "Who is wickeder than he that sets his impassioned feelings against the judgments of God?" The answer is: He that attributes judgments to God which are to render humanity pitiless.

[2] *Ne' fianchi così poco.* Michael Scot had been in Florence: to which circumstance we are most probably indebted for this curious particular respecting his shape. The consignment of such men to hell is a mortifying instance of the great poet's participation in the vulgarest errors of his time. It is hardly, however, worth notice, considering what we see him swallowing every moment, or pretending to swallow.

stooping along, projecting his face over his swarthy shoulders. Guido Bonatti, too, was there, astrologer of Forli; and Ardente, shoemaker of Parma, who now wishes he had stuck to his last; and the wretched women who quit the needle and the distaff to wreak their malice with herbs and images. Such was the punishment of those who, desiring to see too far before them, now looked only behind them, and walked the reverse way of their looking.

The fifth gulf was a lake of boiling pitch, constantly heaving and subsiding throughout, and bubbling with the breath of those within it. They were Public Peculators. Winged black devils were busy about the lake, pronging the sinners when they occasionally darted up their backs for relief like dolphins, or thrust out their jaws like frogs. Dante at first looked eagerly down into the gulf, like one who feels that he shall turn away instantly, out of the very horror that attracts him. "See—look behind thee!" said Virgil, dragging him at the same time from the place where he stood, to a covert behind a crag. Dante looked round, and beheld a devil coming up with a newly-arrived sinner across his shoulders, whom he hurled into the lake, and then dashed down after him, like a mastiff let loose on a thief. It was a man from Lucca, where every soul was a false dealer except Bonturo.[1] The devil called out to other devils, and a heap of them fell upon the wretch with hooks as he rose to the surface; telling him, that he must practise there in secret, if he practised at all; and thrusting him back into the boiling pitch,

[1] "Bonturo must have sold him something cheap," exclaimed a hearer of this passage. No:—the exception is an irony! There was not one honest man in all Lucca!

as cooks thrust back flesh into the pot. The devils were of the lowest and most revolting habits, of which they made disgusting jest and parade. Some of them, on a sudden, perceived Dante and his guide, and were going to seize them, when Virgil resorted to his usual holy rebuke. For a while they let him alone; and Dante saw one of them haul a sinner out of the pitch by the clotted locks, and hold him up sprawling like an otter. The rest then fell upon him and flayed him.

It was Ciampolo, a peculator in the service of the good Thiebault, king of Navarre. One of his companions under the pitch was Friar Gomita, governor of Gallura; and another, Michael Zanche, also a Sardinian. Ciampolo ultimately escaped by a trick out of the hands of the devils, who were so enraged that they turned upon the two pilgrims; but Virgil, catching up Dante with supernatural force, as a mother does a child in a burning house, plunged with him out of their jurisdiction into the borders of gulf the sixth, the region of Hypocrites.

The hypocrites, in perpetual tears, walked about in a wearisome and exhausted manner, as if ready to faint. They wore huge cowls, which hung over their eyes, and the outsides of which were gilded, but the insides of lead. Two of them had been rulers of Florence; and Dante was listening to their story, when his attention was called off by the sight of a cross, on which Caiaphas the High Priest was writhing, breathing hard all the while through his beard with sighs. It was his office to see that every soul which passed him, on its arrival in the place, was oppressed with the due weight.

His father-in-law, Annas, and all his council, were stuck in like manner on crosses round the borders of the gulf. The pilgrims beheld little else in this region of weariness, and soon passed into the borders of one of the most terrible portions of Evil-Budget, the land of the transformation of Robbers.

The place was thronged with serpents of the most appalling and unwonted description, among which ran tormented the naked spirits of the robbers, agonised with fear. Their hands were bound behind them with serpents—their bodies pierced and enfolded with serpents. Dante saw one of the monsters leap up and transfix a man through the nape of the neck; when, lo! sooner than a pen could write *o*, or *i*, the sufferer burst into flames, burnt up, fell to the earth a heap of ashes—was again brought together, and again became a man, aghast with his agony, and staring about him, sighing.[1] Virgil asked him who he was.

"I was but lately rained down into this dire gullet," said the man, "amidst a shower of Tuscans. The beast Vanni Fucci am I, who led a brutal life, like the mule that I was, in that den Pistoia."

"Compel him to stop," said Dante, "and relate what brought him hither. I knew the bloody and choleric wretch when he was alive."

The sinner, who did not pretend to be deaf to these words, turned round to the speaker with the

[1] "Intorno si mira
Tutto smarrito de la grande angoscia
Ch' egli ha sofferta, e guardando sospira."

This is one of the most terribly natural pictures of agonised astonishment ever painted.

most painful shame in his face, and said, "I feel more bitterly at being caught here by thee in this condition, than when I first arrived. A power which I cannot resist compels me to let thee know, that I am here because I committed sacrilege and charged another with the crime; but now, mark me, that thou mayest hear something not to render this encounter so pleasant: Pistoia hates thy party of the Whites, and longs for the Blacks back again. It will have them, and so will Florence; and there will be a bloody cloud shall burst over the battlefield of Piceno, which will dash many Whites to the earth. I tell thee this to make thee miserable."

So saying, the wretch gave a gesture of contempt with his thumb and finger towards heaven, and said, "Take it, God—a fig for thee!"[1]

"From that instant," said Dante, "the serpents and I were friends; for one of them throttled him into silence, and another dashed his hands into a knot behind his back. O Pistoia! Pistoia! why

[1] I retain this passage, horrible as it is to Protestant ears, because it is not only an instance of Dante's own audacity, but a salutary warning specimen of the extremes of impiety generated by extreme superstition; for their first cause is the degradation of the Divine character. Another, no doubt, is the impulsive vehemence of the South. I have heard more blasphemies, in the course of half-an-hour, from the lips of an Italian postilion, than are probably uttered in England, by people not out of their senses, for a whole year. Yet the words, after all, were mere words; for the man was a good-natured fellow, and I believe presented no image to his mind of anything he was saying. Dante, however, would certainly not have taught him better by attempting to frighten him. A violent word would have only produced more violence. Yet this was the idle round which the great poet thought it best to run!

art not thou thyself turned into ashes, and swept from the face of the earth, since thy race has surpassed in evil thine ancestors? Never, through the whole darkness of hell, beheld I a blasphemer so dire as this—not even Capaneus himself."

The Pistoian fled away with the serpents upon him, followed by a Centaur, who came madly galloping up, crying, "Where is the caitiff?" It was the monster-thief Cacus, whose den upon earth often had a pond of blood before it, and to whom Hercules, in his rage, when he slew him, gave a whole hundred blows with his club, though the wretch perceived nothing after the ninth. He was all over adders up to the mouth; and upon his shoulders lay a dragon with its wings open, breathing fire on whomsoever it met.

The Centaur tore away; and Dante and Virgil were gazing after him, when they heard voices beneath the bank on which they stood, crying, "Who are ye?" The pilgrims turned their eyes downwards, and beheld three spirits, one of whom, looking about him, said, "Where's Cianfa?" Dante made a sign to Virgil to say nothing.

Cianfa came forth, a man lately, but now a serpent with six feet.[1]

"If thou art slow to believe, reader, what I am about to tell thee," says the poet, "be so; it is no marvel; for I myself, even now, scarcely credit what I beheld."

The six-footed serpent sprang at one of the three men front to front, clasping him tightly with all its legs, and plunging his fangs into either

[1] Cianfa, probably a condottiere of Mrs. Radcliffe's sort, and robber on a large scale, is said to have been one of the Donati family, connexions of the poet by marriage.

cheek. Ivy never stuck so close to a tree as the horrible monster grappled with every limb of that pinioned man. The two forms then gradually mingled into one another like melting wax, the colours of their skin giving way at the same time to a third colour, as the white in a piece of burning paper recedes before the brown, till it all becomes black. The other two human shapes looked on, exclaiming, "Oh, how thou changest, Agnello! See, thou art neither two nor yet one." And truly, though the two heads first became one, there still remained two countenances in the face. The four arms then became but two, and such also became the legs and thighs; and the two trunks became such a body as was never beheld; and the hideous twofold monster walked slowly away.[1]

A small black serpent on fire now flashed like lightning on to the body of one of the other two, piercing him in the navel, and then falling on the ground, and lying stretched before him. The wounded man, fascinated and mute, stood looking at the adder's eyes, and endeavouring to stand steady on his legs, yawning the while as if smitten with lethargy or fever; the adder, on his part, looked up at the eyes of the man, and both of them breathed hard, and sent forth a smoke that mingled into one volume.

And now, let Lucan never speak more of the wretched Sabellus or Nisidius, but listen and be

[1] This, and the transformation that follows, may well excite the pride of such a poet as Dante; though it is curious to see how he selects inventions of this kind as special grounds of self-complacency. They are the most appalling ever yet produced.

silent; and now, let Ovid be silent, nor speak again of his serpent that was Cadmus, or his fountain that was Arethusa; for, says the Tuscan poet, I envy him not. Never did he change the natures of two creatures face to face, so that each received the form of the other.

With corresponding impulse, the serpent split his train into a fork, while the man drew his legs together into a train; the skin of the serpent grew soft, while the man's hardened; the serpent acquired tresses of hair, the man grew hairless; the claws of the one projected into legs, while the arms of the other withdrew into his shoulders; the face of the serpent, as it rose from the ground, retreated towards the temples, pushing out human ears; that of the man, as he fell to the ground, thrust itself forth into a muzzle, withdrawing at the same time its ears into its head, as the slug does its horns; and each creature kept its impious eyes fixed on the other's, while the features beneath the eyes were changing. The soul which had become the serpent then turned to crawl away, hissing in scorn as he departed; and the serpent, which had become the man, spat after him, and spoke words at him. The new human-looking soul then turned his back on his late adversary, and said to the third spirit, who remained unchanged, "Let Buoso now take to his crawl, as I have done."

The two then hastened away together, leaving Dante in a state of bewildered amazement, yet not so confused but that he recognised the unchanged one for another of his countrymen, Puccio the Lame. "Joy to thee, Florence!" cried the poet; "not content with having thy name bruited over land and sea, it flourishes throughout hell."

The pilgrims now quitted the seventh, and looked down from its barrier into the eighth gulf, where they saw innumerable flames, distinct from one another, flickering all over the place like fire-flies.

"In those flames," said Virgil, "are souls, each tormented with the fire that swathes it."

"I observe one," said Dante, "divided at the summit. Are the Theban brothers in it?"

"No," replied Virgil; "in that flame are Diomed and Ulysses." The sinners punished in this gulf were Evil Counsellors; and those two were the advisers of the stratagem of the Trojan horse.

Virgil addressed Ulysses, who told him the conclusion of his adventures, not to be found in books: how he tired of an idle life, and sailed forth again into the wide ocean; and how he sailed so far that he came into a region of new stars, and in sight of a mountain, the loftiest he ever saw; when, unfortunately, a hurricane fell upon them from the shore, thrice whirled their vessel round, then dashed the stern up in air and the prow under water, and sent the billows over their heads.

"Enough," said Virgil; "I trouble thee no more." The soul of Guido di Montefeltro, overhearing the great Mantuan speak in a Lombard dialect, asked him news of the state of things in Romagna; and then told him how he had lost his chance of paradise, by thinking Pope Boniface could at once absolve him from his sins, and use them for his purposes.[1] He was going to heaven,

[1] Guido, Conte di Montefeltro, a celebrated soldier of that day, became a Franciscan in his old age, in order to repent

he said, by the help of St. Francis, who came on purpose to fetch him, when a black angel met them, and demanded his absolved, indeed, but unrepented victim. "To repent evil, and to will to do it, at one and the same time, are," said the dreadful angel, "impossible: therefore wrong me not." "Oh, how I shook," said the unhappy Guido, "when he laid his hands upon me!" And with these words the flame writhed and beat itself about for agony, and so took its way.

The pilgrims crossed over to the banks of the ninth gulf, where the Sowers of Scandal, the Schismatics, Heretics, and Founders of False Religions, underwent the penalties of such as load themselves with the sins of those whom they seduce.

The first sight they beheld was Mahomet, tearing open his own bowels, and calling out to them to mark him. Before him walked his son-in-law, Ali, weeping, and cloven to the chin; and the divisions in the church were punished in like manner upon all the schismatics in the place. They all walked round the circle, their gashes closing as they went; and on their reaching a certain point, a fiend hewed them open again with a sword. The Arabian prophet, ere he passed on, bade the pilgrims warn Friar Dolcino how he suffered himself to be surprised in his mountain-hold by the

of his sins; but, being consulted in his cloister by Pope Boniface on the best mode of getting possession of an estate belonging to the Colonna family, and being promised absolution for his sins in the lump, including the opinion requested, he recommended the holy father to "promise much, and perform nothing" (*molto promettere, e nulla attendere*).

starvations of winter-time, if he did not wish speedily to follow him.[1]

Among other mangled wretches, they beheld Piero of Medicina, a sower of dissension, exhibiting to them his face and throat all over wounds; and Curio, compelled to shew his tongue cut out for advising Cæsar to cross the Rubicon; and Mosca de' Lamberti, an adviser of assassination, and one of the authors of the Guelph and Ghibelline miseries, holding up the bleeding stumps of his arms, which dripped on his face. "Remember Mosca," cried he; "remember him, alas! who said, 'A deed done is a thing ended.' A bad saying of mine was that for the Tuscan nation."

"And death to thy family," cried Dante.

The assassin hurried away like a man driven mad with grief upon grief; and Dante now beheld a sight, which, if it were not, he says, for the testimony of a good conscience—that best of friends, which gives a man assurance of himself under the breastplate of a spotless innocence[2]—he should be afraid

[1] Dolcino was a Lombard friar at the beginning of the fourteenth century, who is said to have preached a community of goods, including women, and to have pretended to a divine mission for reforming the church. He appears to have made a considerable impression, having thousands of followers, but was ultimately seized in the mountains where they lived, and burnt with his female companion Margarita, and many others. Landino says he was very eloquent, and that "both he and Margarita endured their fate with a firmness worthy of a better cause." Probably his real history is not known, for want of somebody in such times bold enough to write it.

[2] Literally, "under the breastplate of knowing himself to be pure:"

"Sotto l' osbergo del sentirsi pura."

The expression is deservedly admired; but it is not allowable

to relate without further proof. He saw—and while he was writing the account of it he still appeared to see—a headless trunk about to come past him with the others. It held its severed head by the hair, like a lantern; and the head looked up at the two pilgrims, and said, "Woe is me!" The head was, in fact, a lantern to the paths of the trunk; and thus there were two separated things in one, and one in two; and how that could be, he only can tell who ordained it. As the figure came nearer, it lifted the head aloft, that the pilgrims might hear better what it said.

"Behold," it said, "behold, thou that walkest living among the dead, and say if there be any punishment like this. I am Bertrand de Born, he that incited John of England to rebel against his father. Father and son I set at variance—closest affections I set at variance—and hence do I bear my brain severed from the body on which it grew. In me behold the work of retribution."[1]

The eyes of Dante were so inebriate with all that diversity of bleeding wounds, that they longed to stay and weep ere his guide proceeded further.

in English, and it is the only one admitting no equivalent which I have met with in the whole poem. It might be argued, perhaps, against the perfection of the passage, that a good "conscience," and a man's "knowing himself to be pure," are a tautology; for Dante himself has already used that word;

"Conscienzia m' assicura;
La buona compagnia che l' uom francheggia
Sotto l' osbergo," &c.

But still we feel the impulsive beauty of the phrase; and I wish I could have kept it.

[1] This ghastly fiction is a rare instance of the meeting of physical horror with the truest pathos.

Something also struck them on the sudden which added to his desire to stop. But Virgil asked what ailed him, and why he stood gazing still on the wretched multitude. "Thou hast not done so," continued he, "in any other portion of this circle; and the valley is twenty-two miles further about, and the moon already below us. Thou hast more yet to see than thou wottest of, and the time is short."

Dante, excusing himself for the delay, and proceeding to follow his leader, said he thought he had seen, in the cavern at which he was gazing so hard, a spirit that was one of his own family —and it was so. It was the soul of Geri del Bello, a cousin of the poet's. Virgil said that he had observed him, while Dante was occupied with Bertrand de Born, pointing at his kinsman in a threatening manner. "Waste not a thought on him," concluded the Roman, "but leave him as he is."

"O honoured guide!" said Dante, "he died a violent death, which his kinsmen have not yet avenged; and hence it is that he disdained to speak to me; and I must needs feel for him the more on that account."[1]

They came now to the last partition of the circle of Evil-Budget, and their ears were assailed with such a burst of sharp wailings, that Dante was fain to close his with his hands. The misery there, accompanied by a horrible odour, was as if all the hospitals in the sultry marshes of Valdichiana had brought their maladies together into one infernal ditch. It was the place of punishment for pretended Alchemists, Coiners, Personators of other

[1] The reader will not fail to notice this characteristic instance of the ferocity of the time.

people, False Accusers, and Impostors of all such descriptions. They lay on one another in heaps, or attempted to crawl about—some itching madly with leprosies—some swollen and gasping with dropsies—some wetly reeking, like hands washed in winter-time. One was an alchemist of Siena, a nation vainer than the French; another a Florentine, who tricked a man into making a wrong will; another, Simon of Troy; another, Myrrha; another, the wife of Potiphar. Their miseries did not hinder them from giving one another malignant blows; and Dante was listening eagerly to an abusive conversation between Sinon and a Brescian coiner, when Virgil rebuked him for the disgraceful condescension, and said it was a pleasure fit only for vulgar minds.[1]

The blushing poet felt the reproof so deeply, that he could not speak for shame, though he manifested by his demeanour that he longed to do so, and thus obtained the pardon he despaired of. He says he felt like a man that, during an unhappy dream, wishes himself dreaming while he is so, and does not know it. Virgil understood his emotion, and, as Achilles did with his spear, healed the wound with the tongue that inflicted it.

A silence now ensued between the companions; for they had quitted Evil-Budget, and arrived at the ninth great circle of hell, on the mound of which they passed along, looking quietly and steadily before them. Daylight had given place to

[1] This is admirable sentiment; and it must have been no ordinary consciousness of dignity in general which could have made Dante allow himself to be the person rebuked for having forgotten it. Perhaps it was a sort of penance for his having, on some occasion, fallen into the unworthiness.

twilight; and Dante was advancing his head a little, and endeavouring to discern objects in the distance, when his whole attention was called to one particular spot, by a blast of a horn so loud, that a thunderclap was a whisper in comparison. Orlando himself blew no such terrific blast, after the dolorous rout, when Charlemagne was defeated in his holy enterprise.[1] The poet raised his head, thinking he perceived a multitude of lofty towers. He asked Virgil to what region they belonged; but Virgil said, "Those are no towers: they are giants, standing each up to his middle in the pit that goes round this circle." Dante looked harder; and as objects clear up by little and little in the departing mist, he saw, with alarm, the tremendous giants that warred against Jove, standing half in and half out of the pit, like the towers that crowned the citadel of Monteseggione. The one whom he saw plainest, and who stood with his arms hanging down on each side, appeared to him to have a face as huge as the pinnacle of St. Peter's and limbs throughout in proportion. The monster, as the pilgrims were going by, opened his dreadful mouth, fit for no sweeter psalmody, and called after them, in the words of some unknown tongue, *Rafel, maee amech zabee almee*.[2] "Dull wretch!" exclaimed Virgil, "keep to thine horn, and so vent better whatsoever frenzy or other passion stuff thee.

[1] By the Saracens in Roncesvalles; afterwards so favourite a topic with the poets. The circumstance of the horn is taken from the Chronicle of the pretended Archbishop Turpin, chapter xxiv.

[2] The gaping monotony of this jargon, full of the vowel *a*, is admirably suited to the mouth of the vast, half-stupid speaker. It is like a babble of the gigantic infancy of the world.

Feel the chain round thy throat, thou confusion! See, what a clenching hoop is about thy gorge!" Then he said to Dante, "His howl is its own mockery. This is Nimrod, he through whose evil ambition it was that mankind ceased to speak one language. Pass him, and say nothing; for every other tongue is to him, as his is to thee."

The companions went on for about the length of a sling's throw, when they passed the second giant, who was much fiercer and huger than Nimrod. He was fettered round and round with chains, that fixed one arm before him and the other behind him—Ephialtes his name, the same that would needs make trial of his strength against Jove himself. The hands which he then wielded were now motionless, but he shook with passion; and Dante thought he should have died for terror, the effect on the ground about him was so fearful. It surpassed that of a tower shaken by an earthquake. The poet expressed a wish to look at Briareus, but he was too far off. He saw, however, Antæus, who, not having fought against heaven, was neither tongue-confounded nor shackled; and Virgil requested the "taker of a thousand lions," by the fame which the living poet had it in his power to give him, to bear the travellers in his arms down the steep descent into this deeper portion of hell, which was the region of tormenting cold. Antæus, stooping, like the leaning tower of Bologna, to take them up, gathered them in his arms, and, depositing them in the gulf below, raised himself to depart like the mast of a ship.[1]

[1] "Nè sì chinato li fece dimora,
E come albero in nave si levò."

A magnificent image! I have retained the idiomatic expres-

Had I hoarse and rugged words equal to my subject, says the poet, I would now make them fuller of expression, to suit the rocky horror of this hole of anguish; but I have not, and therefore approach it with fear, since it is no jesting enterprise to describe the depths of the universe, nor fit for a tongue that babbles of father and mother.[1] Let such of the Muses assist me as turned the words of Amphion into Theban walls; so shall the speech be not too far different from the matter.

Oh, ill-starred creatures! wretched beyond all others, to inhabit a place so hard to speak of—better had ye been sheep or goats.

The poet was beginning to walk with his guide along the place in which the giant had set them down, and was still looking up at the height from which he had descended, when a voice close to him said, "Have a care where thou treadest. Hurt not with thy feet the heads of thy unhappy brethren."

Dante looked down and before him, and saw that he was walking on a lake of ice in which were Murderous Traitors up to their chins, their teeth chattering, their faces held down, their eyes locked up frozen with tears. Dante saw two at his feet so closely stuck together, that the very hairs of their heads were mingled. He asked them who

sion of the original, *raised himself*, instead of saying *rose*, because it seemed to me to give the more grand and deliberate image.

[1] Of "*màmma*" and "*bàbbo*," says the primitive poet. We have corresponding words in English, but the feeling they produce is not identical. The lesser fervour of the northern nations renders them, in some respects, more sophisticate than they suspect, compared with the "artful" Italians.

they were, and as they lifted up their heads for astonishment, and felt the cold doubly congeal them, they dashed their heads against one another for hate and fury. They were two brothers who had murdered each other.[1] Near them were other Tuscans, one of whom the cold had deprived of his ears; and thousands more were seen grinning like dogs, for the pain.

Dante, as he went along, *kicked* the face of one of them, whether by chance, or fate, or *will*,[2] he could not say. The sufferer burst into tears, and cried out, "Wherefore dost thou torment me? Art thou come to revenge the defeat at Montaperto?" The pilgrim at this question felt eager to know who he was; but the unhappy wretch would not tell. His countryman seized him by the hair to force him; but still he said he would not tell, were he to be scalped a thousand times. Dante, upon this, began plucking up his hairs by the roots, the man *barking*,[3] with his eyes squeezed up, at every pull; when another soul exclaimed, "Why, Bocca, what the devil ails thee? Must thou needs bark for cold as well as chatter?"[4]

[1] Alessandro and Napoleon degli Alberti, sons of Alberto, lord of the valley of Falterona in Tuscany. After their father's death they tyrannised over the neighbouring districts, and finally had a mortal quarrel. The name of Napoleon used to be so rare till of late years, even in Italian books, that it gives one a kind of interesting surprise to meet with it.

[2] "Se *voler* fu, o destino o fortuna,
Non so."

What does the Christian reader think of that?

[3] Latrando.

[4] Bocca degli Abbati, whose soul barks like a dog, occasioned the defeat of the Guelphs at Montaperto, in the year 1260, by treacherously cutting off the hand of the standard-bearer.

"Now, accursed traitor, betrayer of thy country's standard," said Dante, "be dumb if thou wilt; for I shall tell thy name to the world."

"Tell and begone!" said Bocca; "but carry the name of this babbler with thee; 'tis Buoso, who left the pass open to the enemy between Piedmont and Parma; and near him is the traitor for the pope, Beccaria; and Ganellone, who betrayed Charlemagne; and Tribaldello, who opened Faenza to the enemy at night-time."

The pilgrims went on, and beheld two other spirits so closely locked up together in one hole of the ice, that the head of one was right over the other's, like a cowl; and Dante, to his horror, saw that the upper head was devouring the lower with all the eagerness of a man who is famished. The poet asked what could possibly make him shew a hate so brutal; adding, that if there were any ground for it, he would tell the story to the world.[1]

The sinner raised his head from the dire repast, and after wiping his jaws with the hair of it, said, "You ask a thing which it shakes me to the heart to think of. It is a story to renew all my misery. But since it will produce this wretch his due infamy, hear it, and you shall see me speak and weep at the same time. How thou camest hither I know not; but I perceive by thy speech that thou art Florentine.

"Learn, then, that I was the Count Ugolino, and this man was Ruggieri the Archbishop. How I trusted him, and was betrayed into prison, there is no need to relate; but of his treatment of me

[1] This is the famous story of Ugolino, who betrayed the castles of Pisa to the Florentines, and was starved with his children in the Tower of Famine.

there, and how cruel a death I underwent, hear; and then judge if he has offended me.

"I had been imprisoned with my children a long time in the tower which has since been called from me the Tower of Famine; and many a new moon had I seen through the hole that served us for a window, when I dreamt a dream that foreshadowed to me what was coming. Methought that this man headed a great chase against the wolf, in the mountains between Pisa and Lucca. Among the foremost in his party were Gualandi, Sismondi, and Lanfranchi, and the hounds were thin and eager, and high-bred; and in a little while I saw the hounds fasten on the flanks of the wolf and the wolf's children, and tear them. At that moment I awoke with the voices of my own children in my ears, asking for bread. Truly cruel must thou be, if thy heart does not ache to think of what I thought then. If thou feel not for a pang like that, what is it for which thou art accustomed to feel? We were now all awake; and the time was at hand when they brought us bread, and we had all dreamt dreams which made us anxious. At that moment I heard the key of the horrible tower turn in the lock of the door below, and fasten it. I looked at my children, and said not a word. I did not weep. I made a strong effort upon the soul within me. But my little Anselm said, 'Father, why do you look so? Is anything the matter?' Nevertheless I did not weep, nor say a word all the day, nor the night that followed. In the morning a ray of light fell upon us through the window of our sad prison, and I beheld in those four little faces the likeness of my own face, and then I began to gnaw my

hands for misery. My children, thinking I did it for hunger, raised themselves on the floor, and said, 'Father, we should be less miserable if you would eat our own flesh. It was you that gave it us. Take it again.' Then I sat still, in order not to make them unhappier: and that day and the next we all remained without speaking. On the fourth day, Gaddo stretched himself at my feet, and said, 'Father, why won't you help me?' and there he died. And as surely as thou lookest on me, so surely I beheld the whole three die in the same manner. So I began in my misery to grope about in the dark for them, for I had become blind; and three days I kept calling on them by name, though they were dead; till famine did for me what grief had been unable to do."

With these words, the miserable man, his eyes starting from his head, seized that other wretch again with his teeth, and ground them against the skull as a dog does with a bone.

O Pisa! scandal of the nations! since thy neighbours are so slow to punish thee, may the very islands tear themselves up from their roots in the sea, and come and block up the mouth of thy river, and drown every soul within thee. What if this Count Ugolino did, as report says he did, betray thy castles to the enemy? his children had not betrayed them; nor ought they to have been put to an agony like this. Their age was their innocence; and their deaths have given thee the infamy of a second Thebes.[1]

[1] I should be loath to disturb the inimitable pathos of this story, if there did not seem grounds for believing that the poet was too hasty in giving credit to parts of it, particularly the ages of some of his fellow-prisoners, and the guilt of the archbishop.

The pilgrims passed on, and beheld other traitors frozen up in swathes of ice, with their heads upside down. Their very tears had hindered them from shedding more; for their eyes were encrusted with the first they shed, so as to be enclosed with them as in a crystal visor, which forced back the others into an accumulation of anguish. One of the sufferers begged Dante to relieve him of this ice, in order that he might vent a little of the burden which it repressed. The poet said he would do so, provided he would disclose who he was. The man said he was the friar Alberigo, who invited some of his brotherhood to a banquet in order to slay them.

"What!" exclaimed Dante, "art thou no longer, then, among the living?"

"Perhaps I appear to be," answered the friar; "for the moment any one commits a treachery like mine, his soul gives up his body to a demon, who thenceforward inhabits it in the man's likeness. Thou knowest Branca Doria, who murdered his father-in-law, Zanche? He seems to be walking the earth still, and yet he has been in this place many years."[1]

"Impossible!" cried Dante; "Branca Doria is still alive; he eats, drinks, and sleeps, like any other man."

"I tell thee," returned the friar, "that the soul of the man he slew had not reached that lake of boiling pitch in which thou sawest him, ere the soul of his slayer was in this place, and his body occupied by a demon in its stead. But now stretch forth thy hand, and relieve mine eyes."

[1] This is the most tremendous lampoon, as far as I am aware, in the whole circle of literature.

Dante relieved them not. Ill manners, he said, were the only courtesy fit for such a wretch.[1]

O ye Genoese! he exclaims,—men that are perversity all over, and full of every corruption to the core, why are ye not swept from the face of the earth? There is one of you whom you fancy to be walking about like other men, and he is all the while in the lowest pit of hell!

"Look before thee," said Virgil, as they advanced: "behold the banners of the King of Hell."

Dante looked, and beheld something which appeared like a windmill in motion, as seen from a distance on a dark night. A wind of inconceivable sharpness came from it.

The souls of those who had been traitors to their benefactors were here frozen up in depths of pellucid ice, where they were seen in a variety of attitudes, motionless; some upright, some downward, some bent double, head to foot.

At length they came to where the being stood who was once eminent for all fair seeming.[2] This

[1] "Cortesia fu lui esser villano." This is the foulest blot which Dante has cast on his own character in all his poem (short of the cruelties he thinks fit to attribute to God). It is argued that he is cruel and false, out of hatred to cruelty and falsehood. But why then add to the sum of both? and towards a man, too, supposed to be suffering eternally? It is idle to discern in such barbarous inconsistencies anything but the writer's own contributions to the stock of them. The utmost credit for right feeling is not to be given on every occasion to a man who refuses it to every one else.

[2] "La creatura ch' ebbe il bel sembiante."

This is touching; but the reader may as well be prepared for a total failure in Dante's conception of Satan, especially the English reader, accustomed to the sublimity of Milton's. Granting that the Roman Catholic poet intended to honour

was the figure that seemed tossing its arms at a distance like a windmill.

"Satan," whispered Virgil; and put himself in front of Dante to reassure him, halting him at the same time, and bidding him summon all his fortitude. Dante stood benumbed, though conscious; as if he himself had been turned to ice. He felt neither alive nor dead.

The lord of the dolorous empire, each of his arms as big as a giant, stood in the ice half-way up his breast. He had one head, but three faces; the middle, vermilion; the one over the right shoulder a pale yellow; the other black. His sails of wings, huger than ever were beheld at sea, were in shape and texture those of a bat; and with these he constantly flapped, so as to send forth the wind that froze the depths of Tartarus. From his six eyes the tears ran down, mingling at his three chins with bloody foam; for at every mouth he crushed a sinner with his teeth, as substances are broken up by an engine. The middle sinner was the worst punished, for he was at once broken and flayed, and his head and trunk were inside the mouth. It was Judas Iscariot. Of the other two, whose heads were hanging out, one was Brutus,

the fallen angel with no sublimity, but to render him an object of mere hate and dread, he has overdone and degraded the picture into caricature. A great stupid being, stuck up in ice, with three faces, one of which is yellow, and three mouths, each eating a sinner, one of those sinners being Brutus,—is an object for derision; and the way in which he eats these, his everlasting *bonnes-bouches*, divides derision with disgust. The passage must be given, otherwise the abstract of the poem would be incomplete; but I cannot help thinking it the worst anti-climax ever fallen into by a great poet.

and the other Cassius. Cassius was very large-limbed. Brutus writhed with agony, but uttered not a word.[1]

"Night has returned," said Virgil, "and all has been seen. It is time to depart onward."

Dante then, at his bidding, clasped, as Virgil did, the huge inattentive being round the neck; and watching their opportunity, as the wings opened and shut, they slipped round it, and so down his shaggy and frozen sides, from pile to pile, clutching it as they went; till suddenly, with the greatest labour and pain, they were compelled to turn themselves upside down, as it seemed, but in reality to regain their proper footing; for they had passed the centre of gravity, and become Antipodes. Then looking down at what lately was upward, they saw Lucifer with his feet towards them; and so taking their departure, ascended a gloomy vault, till at a distance, through an opening above their heads, they beheld the loveliness of the stars.[2]

[1] This silence is, at all events, a compliment to Brutus, especially from a man like Dante, and the more because it is extorted. Dante, no doubt, hated all treachery, particularly treachery to the leader of his beloved Roman emperors; forgetting three things; first, that Cæsar was guilty of treachery himself to the Roman people; second, that he, Dante, has put Curio in hell for advising Cæsar to cross the Rubicon, though he has put the crosser among the good Pagans; and third, that Brutus was educated in the belief that the punishment of such treachery as Cæsar's by assassination was one of the first of duties. How differently has Shakspeare, himself an aristocratic rather than democratic poet, and full of just doubt of the motives of assassins in general, treated the error of the thoughtful, conscientious, Platonic philosopher!

[2] At the close of this medley of genius, pathos, absurdity, sublimity, horror, and revoltingness, it is impossible for any

reflecting heart to avoid asking, *Cui bono?* What is the good of it to the poor wretches, if we are to suppose it true? and what to the world—except, indeed, as a poetic study and a warning against degrading notions of God—if we are to take it simply as a fiction? Theology, disdaining both questions, has an answer confessedly incomprehensible. Humanity replies: Assume not premises for which you have worse than no proofs.

II

THE JOURNEY THROUGH PURGATORY

ARGUMENT

PURGATORY, in the system of Dante, is a mountain at the Antipodes on the top of which is the Terrestrial Paradise, once the seat of Adam and Eve. It forms the principal part of an island in a sea, and possesses a pure air. Its lowest region, with one or two exceptions of redeemed Pagans, is occupied by Excommunicated Penitents and by Delayers of Penitence, all of whom are compelled to lose time before their atonement commences. The other and greater portion of the ascent is divided into circles or plains, in which are expiated the Seven Deadly Sins. The Poet ascends from circle to circle with Virgil and Statius, and is met in a forest on the top by the spirit of Beatrice, who transports him to Heaven.

HEN the pilgrims emerged from the opening through which they beheld the stars, they found themselves in a scene which enchanted them with hope and joy. It was dawn: a sweet pure air came on their faces; and they beheld a sky of the loveliest oriental sapphire, whose colour seemed to pervade the whole serene hollow from earth to heaven. The beautiful planet which

encourages loving thoughts made all the orient laugh, obscuring by its very radiance the stars in its train; and among those which were still lingering and sparkling in the southern horizon, Dante saw four in the shape of a cross, never beheld by man since they gladdened the eyes of our first parents. Heaven seemed to rejoice in their possession. O widowed northern pole! bereaved art thou, indeed, since thou canst not gaze upon them![1]

1 "Dolce color d' oriental zaffiro
Che s' accoglieva nel sereno aspetto
De l' aer puro infino al primo giro,

A gli occhi miei ricominciò diletto,
Tosto ch' io usci' fuor de l' aura morta
Che m' avea contristati gli occhi e 'l petto.

Lo bel pianeta, ch' ad amar conforta,
Faceva tutto rider l' oriente,
Velando i Pesci, ch' erano in sua scorta.

Io mi volsi a man destra, e posi mente
All' altro polo, e vidi quattro stelle
Non viste mai, fuor ch' a la prima gente;

Goder pareva 'l ciel di lor fiammelle.
O settentrional vedovo sito,
Poi che privato sei di mirar quelle!"

The sweetest oriental sapphire blue,
Which the whole air in its pure bosom had,
Greeted mine eyes, far as the heavens withdrew;

So that again they felt assured and glad,
Soon as they issued forth from the dead air,
Where every sight and thought had made them sad.

The beauteous star, which lets no love despair,
Made all the orient laugh with loveliness,
Veiling the Fish that glimmered in its hair.

The poet turned to look at the north where he had been accustomed to see stars that no longer appeared, and beheld, at his side, an old man who struck his beholder with a veneration like that of a son for his father. He had gray hairs, and a long beard which parted in two down his bosom; and the four southern stars beamed on

> I turned me to the right to gaze and bless,
> And saw four more, never of living wight
> Beheld, since Adam brought us our distress;
>
> Heaven seemed rejoicing in their happy light.
> O widowed northern pole, bereaved indeed,
> Since thou hast had no power to see that sight!

Readers who may have gone thus far with the "Italian Pilgrim's Progress," will allow me to congratulate them on arriving at this lovely scene, one of the most admired in the poem.

This is one of the passages which make the religious admirers of Dante inclined to pronounce him divinely inspired; for how could he otherwise have seen stars, they ask us, which were not discovered till after his time, and which compose the constellation of the Cross? But other commentators are of opinion, that the Cross, though not so named till subsequently (and Dante, we see, gives no prophetic hint about the name) *had* been seen, probably by stray navigators. An Arabian globe is even mentioned by Mr. Artaud (see Cary), in which the Southern Cross is set down. Mr. Cary, in his note on the passage, refers to Seneca's prediction of the discovery of America; most likely suggested by similar information. "But whatever," he adds, "may be thought of this, it is certain that the four stars are here symbolical of the four cardinal virtues;" and he refers to canto xxxi., where those virtues are retrospectively associated with these stars. The symbol, however, is not necessary. Dante was a very curious inquirer on all subjects, and evidently acquainted with ships and seamen as well as geography; and his imagination would eagerly have seized a magnificent novelty like this, and used it the first opportunity. Columbus's discovery, as the reader will see, was anticipated by Pulci.

his face with such lustre, that his aspect was as radiant as if he had stood in the sun.

"Who are ye?" said the old man, "that have escaped from the dreadful prison-house? Can the laws of the abyss be violated? Or has Heaven changed its mind, that thus ye are allowed to come from the regions of condemnation into mine?"

It was the spirit of Cato of Utica, the warder of the ascent of Purgatory.

The Roman poet explained to his countryman who they were, and how Dante was under heavenly protection; and then he prayed leave of passage of him by the love he bore to the chaste eyes of his Marcia, who sent him a message from the Pagan circle, hoping that he would still own her.

Cato replied, that although he was so fond of Marcia while on earth that he could deny her nothing, he had ceased, in obedience to new laws, to have any affection for her, now that she dwelt beyond the evil river; but as the pilgrim, his companion, was under heavenly protection, he would of course do what he desired.[1] He then desired him to gird his companion with one of the simplest and completest rushes he would see by the water's side, and to wash the stain of the lower world out of his face, and so take their journey up the mountain before them, by a path which the

[1] Generous and disinterested!—Cato, the republican enemy of Cæsar, and committer of suicide, is not luckily chosen for his present office by the poet who has put Brutus into the devil's mouth in spite of his agreeing with Cato, and the suicide Piero delle Vigne into hell in spite of his virtues. But Dante thought Cato's austere manners like his own.

rising sun would disclose. And with these words he disappeared.[1]

The pilgrims passed on, with the eagerness of one who thinks every step in vain till he finds the path he has lost. The full dawn by this time had arisen, and they saw the trembling of the sea in the distance.[2] Virgil then dipped his hands into a spot of dewy grass, where the sun had least affected it, and with the moisture bathed the face of Dante, who held it out to him, suffused with tears;[3] and then they went on till they came to a solitary shore, whence no voyager had ever returned, and there the loins of the Florentine were girt with the rush.

On this shore they were standing in doubt how

[1] The girding with the rush (*giunco schietto*) is supposed by the commentators to be an injunction of simplicity and patience. Perhaps it is to enjoin sincerity; especially as the region of expiation has now been entered, and sincerity is the first step to repentance. It will be recollected that Dante's former girdle, the cord of the Franciscan friars, has been left in the hands of Fraud.

[2] "L' alba vinceva l' ora mattutina
Che fuggia 'nnanzi, sì che di lontano
Conobbi il tremolar de la marina."

The lingering shadows now began to flee
Before the whitening dawn, so that mine eyes
Discerned far off the trembling of the sea.

"Conobbi il tremolar de la marina"

is a beautiful verse, both for the picture and the sound.

[3] This evidence of humility and gratitude on the part of Dante would be very affecting, if we could forget all the pride and passion he has been shewing elsewhere, and the torments in which he has left his fellow-creatures. With these recollections upon us, it looks like an overweening piece of self-congratulation at other people's expense.

to proceed,—moving onward, as it were, in mind, while yet their feet were staying,—when they beheld a light over the water at a distance, rayless at first as the planet Mars when he looks redly out of the horizon through a fog, but speedily growing brighter and brighter with amazing swiftness. Dante had but turned for an instant to ask his guide what it was, when, on looking again, it had grown far brighter. Two splendid phenomena, he knew not what, then developed themselves from it on either side; and, by degrees, another below it. The two splendours quickly turned out to be wings; and Virgil, who had hitherto watched its coming in silence, cried out, "Down, down,—on thy knees! It is God's angel. Clasp thine hands. Now thou shalt behold operancy indeed. Lo, how he needs neither sail nor oar, coming all this way with nothing but his wings! Lo, how he holds them aloft, using the air with them at his will, and knowing they can never be weary."

The "divine bird" grew brighter and brighter as he came, so that the eye at last could not sustain the lustre; and Dante turned his to the ground. A boat then rushed to shore which the angel had brought with him, so light that it drew not a drop of water. The celestial pilot stood at the helm, with bliss written in his face; and a hundred spirits were seen within the boat, who, lifting up their voices, sang the psalm beginning "When Israel came out of Egypt." At the close of the psalm, the angel blessed them with the sign of the cross, and they all leaped to shore; upon which he turned round, and departed as swiftly as he came.

The new-comers, after gazing about them for a

while, in the manner of those who are astonished to see new sights, inquired of Virgil and his companion the best way to the mountain. Virgil explained who they were; and the spirits, pale with astonishment at beholding in Dante a living and breathing man, crowded about him, in spite of their anxiety to shorten the period of their trials. One of them came darting out of the press to embrace him, in a manner so affectionate as to move the poet to return his warmth; but his arms again and again found themselves crossed on his own bosom, having encircled nothing. The shadow, smiling at the astonishment in the other's face, drew back; and Dante hastened as much forward to shew his zeal in the greeting, when the spirit in a sweet voice recommended him to desist. The Florentine then knew who it was,—Casella, a musician, to whom he had been much attached. After mutual explanations as to their meeting, Dante requested his friend, if no ordinance opposed it, to refresh his spirit awhile with one of the tender airs that used to charm away all his troubles on earth. Casella immediately began one of his friend's own productions, commencing with the words,

> "Love, that delights to talk unto my soul
> Of all the wonders of my lady's nature."

And he sang it so beautifully, that the sweetness rang within the poet's heart while recording the circumstance. The other spirits listened with such attention, that they seemed to have forgotten the very purpose of their coming; when suddenly the voice of Cato was heard, sternly rebuking their

delay; and the whole party speeded in trepidation towards the mountain.[1]

The two pilgrims, who had at first hastened with the others, in a little while slackened their steps; and Dante found that his body projected a shadow, while the form of Virgil had none. When arrived at the foot of the mountain, they were joined by a second party of spirits, of whom Virgil inquired the way up it. One of the spirits, of a noble aspect, but with a gaping wound in his forehead, stepped forth, and asked Dante if he remembered him. The poet humbly answering in the negative, the stranger disclosed a second wound, that was in his bosom; and then, with a smile, announced himself as Manfredi, king of Naples, who was slain in battle against Charles of Anjou, and died excommunicated. Manfredi gave Dante a message to his daughter Costanza, queen of Arragon, begging her to shorten the consequences of the excommunication by her prayers; since he, like the rest of the party with him, though repenting of his contumacy against the

[1] "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona
De la mia donna disiosamente,"

is the beginning of the ode sung by Dante's friend. The incident is beautifully introduced; and Casella's being made to select a production from the pen of the man who asks him to sing, very delicately implies a graceful cordiality in the musician's character.

Milton alludes to the passage in his sonnet to Henry Lawes:

"Thou honour'st verse, and verse must lend her wing
To honour thee, the priest of Phœbus' quire,
That tun'st their happiest lines in hymn or story.
Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher
Than his Casella, whom he wooed to sing,
Met in the milder shades of Purgatory."

church, would have to wander on the outskirts of Purgatory three times as long as the presumption had lasted unless relieved by such petitions from the living.[1]

Dante went on, with his thoughts so full of this request, that he did not perceive he had arrived at the path which Virgil asked for, till the wandering spirits called out to them to say so. The pilgrims then, with great difficulty, began to ascend through an extremely narrow passage; and Virgil, after explaining to Dante how it was that in this antipodal region his eastward face beheld the sun in the north instead of the south, was encouraging him to proceed manfully in the hope of finding the path easier by degrees, and of reposing at the end of it, when they heard a voice observing, that they would most likely find it expedient to repose a little sooner. The pilgrims looked about them, and observed close at hand a crag of a rock, in the shade of which some spirits were standing, as men stand idly at noon. Another was sitting down, as if tired out, with his arms about his knees, and his face bent down between them.[2]

[1] Manfredi was the natural son of the Emperor Frederick the Second. "He was lively and agreeable in his manners," observes Mr. Cary, "and delighted in poetry, music, and dancing. But he was luxurious and ambitious, void of religion, and in his philosophy an epicurean."—*Translation of Dante*, Smith's edition, p. 77. Thus King Manfredi ought to have been in a red-hot tomb, roasting for ever with Epicurus himself, and with the father of the poet's beloved friend, Guido Cavalcante; but he was the son of an emperor, and a foe to the house of Anjou; so Dante gives him a passport to heaven. There is no ground whatever for the repentance assumed in the text.

[2] The unexpected bit of comedy here ensuing is very remarkable and pleasant. Belacqua, according to an old commentator, was a musician.

"Dearest master!" exclaimed Dante to his guide, "what thinkest thou of a croucher like this, for manful journeying? Verily he seems to have been twin-born with Idleness herself."

The croucher, lifting up his eyes at these words, looked hard at Dante, and said, "Since thou art so stout, push on."

Dante then saw it was Belacqua, a pleasant acquaintance of his, famous for his indolence.

"That was a good lesson," said Belacqua, "that was given thee just now in astronomy."

The poet could not help smiling at the manner in which his acquaintance uttered these words, it was so like his ways of old. Belacqua pretended, even in another world, that it was of no use to make haste, since the angel had prohibited his going higher up the mountain. He and his companions had to walk round the foot of it as many years as they had delayed repenting; unless, as in the case of Manfredi, their time was shortened by the prayers of good people.

A little further on, the pilgrims encountered the spirits of such Delayers of Penitence as, having died violent deaths, repented at the last moment. One of them, Buonconte da Montefeltro, who died in battle, and whose body could not be found, described how the devil, having been hindered from seizing him by the shedding of a single tear, had raised in his fury a tremendous tempest, which sent the body down the river Arno, and buried it in the mud.[1]

[1] Buonconte was the son of that Guido da Montefeltro, whose soul we have seen carried off from St. Francis by a devil, for having violated the conditions of penitence. It is curious that both father and son should have been contested for in this manner.

Another spirit, a female, said to Dante, "Ah! when thou returnest to earth, and shalt have rested from thy long journey, remember me,—Pia. Sienna gave me life; the Marshes took it from me. This he knows, who put on my finger the wedding-ring."[1]

[1] This is the most affecting and comprehensive of all brief stories.

"Deh quando tu sarai tornato al mondo,
E riposato dè la lunga via,
Seguitò 'l terzo spirito al secondo,

Ricorditi di me che son la Pia:
Siena mi fè; disfecemi Maremma;
Salsi colui che 'nnanellata pria

Disposando m' avea con la sua gemma."

Ah, when thou findest thee again on earth
(Said then a female soul), remember me,—
Pia. Sienna was my place of birth,

The Marshes of my death. This knoweth he,
Who placed upon my hand the spousal ring.

"Nello della Pietra," says M. Beyle, in his work entitled *De l'Amour*, "obtained in marriage the hand of Madonna Pia, sole heiress of the Ptolomei, the richest and most noble family of Sienna. Her beauty, which was the admiration of all Tuscany, gave rise to a jealousy in the breast of her husband, that, envenomed by wrong reports and suspicions continually reviving, led to a frightful catastrophe. It is not easy to determine at this day if his wife was altogether innocent; but Dante has represented her as such. Her husband carried her with him into the marshes of Volterra, celebrated then, as now, for the pestiferous effects of the air. Never would he tell his wife the reason of her banishment into so dangerous a place. His pride did not deign to pronounce either complaint or accusation. He lived with her alone, in a deserted tower, of which I have been to see the ruins on the sea-shore; he never broke his disdainful silence, never replied to the questions of his youthful bride, never listened

The majority of this party were so importunate with the Florentine to procure them the prayers of their friends, that he had as much difficulty to get away, as a winner at dice has to free himself from the mercenary congratulations of the by-standers. On resuming their way, Dante quoted to Virgil a passage in the Æneid, decrying the utility of prayer, and begged him to explain how it was to be reconciled with what they had just heard. Virgil advised him to wait for the explanation till he saw Beatrice, whom, he now said, he should meet at the top of the mountain. Dante, at this information, expressed a desire to hasten their progress; and Virgil, seeing a spirit looking towards them as they advanced, requested him to acquaint them with the shortest road.

The spirit, maintaining a lofty and reserved aspect, was as silent as if he had not heard the request; intimating by his manner that they might as well proceed without repeating it, and eyeing them like a lion on the watch. Virgil, however, went up to him, and gently urged it; but the only reply was a question as to who they were and of what country. The Latin poet beginning to answer him, had scarcely mentioned the word

to her entreaties. He waited, unmoved by her, for the air to produce its fatal effects. The vapours of this unwholesome swamp were not long in tarnishing features the most beautiful, they say, that in that age had appeared upon earth. In a few months she died. Some chroniclers of these remote times report that Nello employed the dagger to hasten her end: she died in the marshes in some horrible manner; but the mode of her death remained a mystery, even to her contemporaries. Nello della Pietra survived, to pass the rest of his days in a silence which was never broken."—Hazlitt's *Journey through France and Italy*, p. 315.

"Mantua," when the stranger went as eagerly up to his interrogator as the latter had done to him, and said, "Mantua! My own country! My name is Sordello." And the compatriots embraced.

O degenerate Italy! exclaims Dante; land without affections, without principle, without faith in any one good thing! here was a man who could not hear the sweet sound of a fellow-citizen's voice without feeling his heart gush towards him, and there are no people now in any one of thy towns that do not hate and torment one another.

Sordello, in another tone, now exclaimed, "But who are ye?"

Virgil disclosed himself, and Sordello fell at his feet.[1]

Sordello now undertook to accompany the great Roman poet and his friend to a certain distance on their ascent towards the penal quarters of the mountain; but as evening was drawing nigh, and the ascent could not be made properly in the dark, he proposed that they should await the dawning of the next day in a recess that overlooked a flowery hollow. The hollow was a lovely spot of ground, enamelled with flowers that surpassed the exquisitest dyes, and green with a grass brighter than emeralds newly broken.[2] There rose from it also a fragrance of a thousand different kinds of sweetness, all mingled into one that was new

[1] Sordello was a famous Provençal poet; with whose writings the world has but lately been made acquainted through the researches of M. Raynouard, in his *Choix des Poésies des Troubadours*, &c.

[2] "Fresco smeraldo in l' ora che si fiacca."

An exquisite image of newness and brilliancy.

and indescribable; and with the fragrance there ascended the chant of the prayer beginning, "Hail, Queen of Heaven,"[1] which was sung by a multitude of souls that appeared sitting on the flowery sward.

Virgil pointed them out. They were penitent delayers of penitence, of sovereign rank. Among them, however, were spirits who sat mute; one of whom was the Emperor Rodolph, who ought to have attended better to Italy, the garden of the empire; and another, Ottocar, king of Bohemia, his enemy, who now comforted him; and another, with a small nose,[2] Philip the Third of France, who died a fugitive, shedding the leaves of the lily; he sat beating his breast; and with him was Henry the Third of Navarre, sighing with his cheek on his hand. One was the father, and one the father-in-law of Philip the Handsome, the bane of France; and it was on account of his unworthiness they grieved.

But among the singers Virgil pointed out the strong-limbed King of Arragon, Pedro; and Charles, king of Naples, with his masculine nose (these two were singing together); and Henry the Third of England, the king of the simple life, sitting by himself;[3] and below these, but with his eyes in heaven, Guglielmo, marquis of Montferrat.

[1] "Salve, Regina:" the beginning of a Roman Catholic chant to the Virgin.

[2] "With nose deprest," says Mr. Cary. But Dante says, literally, "small nose,"—*nasetto*. So, further on, he says, "masculine nose,"—*maschio naso*. He meant to imply the greater or less determination of character, which the size of that feature is supposed to indicate.

[3] An English reader is surprised to find here a sovereign for whom he has been taught to entertain little respect. But Henry was a devout servant of the Church.

It was now the hour when men at sea think longingly of home, and feel their hearts melt within them to remember the day on which they bade adieu to beloved friends; and now, too, was the hour when the pilgrim, new to his journey, is thrilled with the like tenderness, when he hears the vesper bell in the distance, which seems to mourn for the expiring day.[1] At this hour of the coming darkness, Dante beheld one of the spirits in the flowery hollow arise, and after giving a signal to the others to do as he did, stretch forth both

1 "Era già l' ora che volge 'l desio
A' naviganti, e intenerisce 'l cuore
Lo dì ch' an detto a' dolci amici a Dio;

E che lo nuovo peregrin d' amore
Punge, se ode squilla di lontano
Che paia 'l giorno pianger che si muore."

A famous passage, untiring in the repetition. It is, indeed, worthy to be the voice of Evening herself.

'Twas now the hour, when love of home melts through
Men's hearts at sea, and longing thoughts portray
The moment when they bade sweet friends adieu;

And the new pilgrim now, on his lone way,
Thrills, if he hears the distant vesper bell,
That seems to mourn for the expiring day.

Everybody knows the line in Gray's Elegy, not unworthily echoed from Dante's—

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day."

Nothing can equal, however, the *tone* in the Italian original,—the

"Pàia 'l giorno piànger che si muòre."

Alas! why could not the great Tuscan have been superior enough to his personal griefs to write a whole book full of such beauties, and so have left us a work truly to be called Divine?

hands, palm to palm, towards the East, and with softest emotion commence the hymn beginning,

"Thee before the closing light."[1]

Upon which all the rest devoutly and softly followed him, keeping their eyes fixed on the heavens. At the end of it they remained, with pale countenances, in an attitude of humble expectation; and Dante saw the angels issue from the quarter to which they looked, and descend towards them with flaming swords in their hands, broken short of the point. Their wings were as green as the leaves in spring; and they wore garments equally green, which the fanning of the wings kept in a state of streaming fluctuation behind them as they came. One of them took his stand on a part of the hill just over where the pilgrims stood, and the other on a hill opposite, so that the party in the valley were between them. Dante could discern their heads of hair, notwithstanding its brightness; but their faces were so dazzling as to be undistinguishable.

"They come from Mary's bosom," whispered Sordello, "to protect the valley from the designs of our enemy yonder,—the Serpent."

Dante looked in trepidation towards the only undefended side of the valley, and beheld the Serpent of Eve coming softly among the grass and flowers, occasionally turning its head, and licking its polished back. Before he could take off his eyes from the evil thing, the two angels had come down like falcons, and at the whirring of their

[1] "Te lucis ante terminum;"—a hymn sung at evening service.

pinions the serpent fled. The angels returned as swiftly to their stations.

Aurora was now looking palely over the eastern cliff on the other side of the globe, and the stars of midnight shining over the heads of Dante and his friends, when they seated themselves for rest on the mountain's side. The Florentine, being still in the flesh, lay down for weariness, and was overcome with sleep. In his sleep he dreamt that a golden eagle flashed down like lightning upon him, and bore him up to the region of fire, where the heat was so intense that it woke him, staring and looking round about with a pale face. His dream was a shadowing of the truth. He had actually come to another place,—to the entrance of Purgatory itself. Sordello had been left behind, Virgil alone remained, looking him cheerfully in the face. Saint Lucy had come from heaven, and shortened the fatigue of his journey by carrying him upwards as he slept, the heathen poet following them. On arriving where they stood, the fair saint intimated the entrance of Purgatory to Virgil by a glance thither of her beautiful eyes, and then vanished as Dante woke.[1]

The portal by which Purgatory was entered was embedded in a cliff. It had three steps, each of a different colour; and on the highest of these there sat, mute and watching, an angel in ash-

[1] Lucy, *Lucia* (supposed to be derived from *lux*, *lucis*), is the goddess (I was almost going to say) who in Roman Catholic countries may be said to preside over *light*, and who is really invoked in maladies of the eyes. She was Dante's favourite saint, possibly for that reason among others, for he had once hurt his eyes with study, and they had been cured. In her spiritual character she represents the light of grace.

coloured garments, holding a naked sword, which glanced with such intolerable brightness on Dante, whenever he attempted to look, that he gave up the endeavour. The angel demanded who they were, and receiving the right answer, gently bade them advance.

Dante now saw, that the lowest step was of marble, so white and clear that he beheld his face in it. The colour of the next was a deadly black, and it was all rough, scorched, and full of cracks. The third was of flaming porphyry, red as a man's blood when it leaps forth under the lancet.[1] The angel, whose feet were on the porphyry, sat on a threshold which appeared to be rock-diamond. Dante, ascending the steps, with the encouragement of Virgil, fell at the angel's feet, and, after thrice beating himself on the breast, humbly asked admittance. The angel, with the point of his sword, inscribed the first letter of the word *peccatum* (sin) seven times on the petitioner's forehead; then bidding him pray with tears for their erasement, and be cautious how he looked back, opened the portal with a silver and a golden key.[2] The hinges roared, as they turned, like thunder; and the pilgrims, on entering, thought they heard, mingling with the sound, a chorus of voices singing, "We praise thee, O God!"[3] It was like the chant that mingles with a cathedral organ, when the words that the choristers utter are at one

[1] The first step typifies consciousness of sin; the second, horror of it; the third, zeal to amend.

[2] The keys of St. Peter. The gold is said by the commentators to mean power to absolve; the silver, the learning and judgment requisite to use it.

[3] "Te Deum laudamus," the well-known hymn of St. Ambrose and St. Augustine.

moment to be distinguished, and at another fade away.

The companions continued ascending till they reached a plain. It stretched as far as the eye could see, and was as lonely as roads across deserts.

This was the first flat, or tableland, of the ascending gradations of Purgatory, and the place of trial for the souls of the Proud. It was bordered with a mound, or natural wall, of white marble sculptured all over with stories of humility. Dante beheld among them the Annunciation, represented with so much life, that the sweet action of the angel seemed to be uttering the very word, "Hail!" and the submissive spirit of the Virgin to be no less impressed, like very wax, in her demeanour. The next story was that of David dancing and harping before the ark,—an action in which he seemed both less and greater than a king. Michal was looking out upon him from a window, like a lady full of scorn and sorrow. Next to the story of David was that of the Emperor Trajan, when he did a thing so glorious, as moved St. Gregory to gain the greatest of all his conquests—the delivering of the emperor's soul from hell.

A widow, in tears and mourning, was laying hold of his bridle as he rode amidst his court with a noise of horses and horsemen, while the Roman eagles floated in gold over his head. The miserable creature spoke out loudly among them all, crying for vengeance on the murderers of her sons. The emperor seemed to say, "Wait till I return."

But she, in the hastiness of her misery, said, "Suppose thou returnest not?"

"Then my successor will attend to thee," replied the emperor.

"And what hast thou to do with the duties of another man," cried she, "if thou attendest not to thine own?"

"Now, be of good comfort," concluded Trajan, "for verily my duty shall be done before I go: justice wills it, and pity arrests me."

Dante was proceeding to delight himself further with these sculptures, when Virgil whispered him to look round and see what was coming. He did so, and beheld strange figures advancing, the nature of which he could not make out at first, for they seemed neither human, nor aught else which he could call to mind. They were souls of the proud, bent double under enormous burdens.

"O proud, miserable, woe-begone Christians!" exclaims the poet; "ye who, in the shortness of your sight, see no reason for advancing in the right path! Know ye not that we are worms, born to compose the angelic butterfly, provided we throw off the husks that impede our flight?"[1]

The souls came slowly on, each bending down in proportion to his burden. They looked like the crouching figures in architecture that are used to support roofs or balconies, and that excite piteous fancies in the beholders. The one that appeared to have the most patience, yet seemed as if he said, "I can endure no further."

[1] "Non v' accorgete voi, che noi siam vermi,
Nati a formar l' angelica farfalla,
Che vola a giustizia senza schermi?"

Know you not, we are worms
Born to compose the angelic butterfly,
That flies to heaven when freed from what deforms?"

The sufferers, notwithstanding their anguish, raised their voices in a paraphrase on the Lord's Prayer, which they concluded with humbly stating, that they repeated the clause against temptation, not for themselves, but for those who were yet living.

Virgil, wishing them a speedy deliverance, requested them to shew the best way of going up to the next circle. Who it was that answered him could not be discerned, on account of their all being so bent down: but a voice gave them the required direction; the speaker adding, that he wished he could raise his eyes, so as to see the living creature that stood near him. He said that his name was Omberto—that he came of the great Tuscan race of Aldobrandesco—and that his countrymen, the Siennese, murdered him on account of his arrogance.

Dante had bent down his own head to listen, and in so doing he was recognised by one of the sufferers, who, eyeing him as well as he could, addressed him by name. The poet replied by exclaiming, "Art thou not Oderisi, the glory of Agubbio, the master of the art of illumination?"

"Ah!" said Oderisi, "Franco of Bologna has all the glory now. His colours make the pages of books laugh with beauty, compared with what mine do.[1] I could not have owned it while on earth, for the sin which has brought me hither; but so it is; and so will it ever be, let a man's fame be never so green and flourishing, unless he can secure a dull age to come after him. Cimabue,

1 "Più ridon le carte
Che penelleggia Franco Bolognese:
L' onore è tutto or suo, e mio in parte."

in painting, lately kept the field against all comers, and now the cry is 'Giotto.' Thus, in song, a new Guido has deprived the first of his glory, and he perhaps is born who shall drive both out of the nest.[1] Fame is but a wind that changes about from all quarters. What does glory amount to at best, that a man should prefer living and growing old for it, to dying in the days of his nurse and his pap-boat, even if it should last him a thousand years? A thousand years!—the twinkling of an eye. Behold this man, who weeps before me; his name resounded once over all our Tuscany, and now it is scarcely whispered in his native place. He was lord there at the time that your once proud but now loathsome Florence had such a lesson given to its frenzy at the battle of Arbia."

"And what is his name?" inquired Dante.

"Salvani," returned the limner. "He is here, because he had the presumption to think that he could hold Sienna in the hollow of his hand. Fifty years has he passed in this manner. Such is the punishment for audacity."

"But why is he here at all," said Dante, "and not in the outer region, among the delayers of repentance?"

[1] The "new Guido" is his friend Guido Cavalcante (now dead); the "first" is Guido Guinicelli, for whose writings Dante had an esteem; and the poet, who is to "chase them from the nest," *caccerà di nido* (as the not very friendly metaphor states it), is with good reason supposed to be himself! He was right; but was the statement becoming? It was certainly not necessary. Dante, notwithstanding his friendship with Guido, appears to have had a grudge against both the Cavalcanti, probably for some scorn they had shewn to his superstition; for they could be proud themselves; and the son has the reputation of scepticism, as well as the father. See the *Decameron, Giorn.* vi. *Nov.* 9.

"Because," exclaimed the other, "in the height of his ascendency he did not disdain to stand in the public place in Sienna, and, trembling in every vein, beg money from the people to ransom a friend from captivity. Do I appear to thee to speak with mysterious significance? Thy countrymen shall too soon help thee to understand me."[1]

Virgil now called Dante away from Oderisi, and bade him notice the ground on which they were treading. It was pavement, wrought all over with figures, like sculptured tombstones. There was Lucifer among them, struck flaming down from heaven; and Briareus, pinned to the earth with the thunderbolt, and, with the other giants, amazing the gods with his hugeness; and Nimrod, standing confounded at the foot of Babel; and Niobe, with her despairing eyes, turned into stone amidst her children; and Saul, dead on his own sword in Gilboa; and Arachne, now half spider, at fault on her own broken web; and Rehoboam, for all his insolence, flying in terror in his chariot; and Alcmæon, who made his mother pay with her life for the ornament she received to betray his father; and Sennacherib, left dead by his son in the temple; and the head of Cyrus, thrown by the motherless woman into the goblet of blood, that it might swill what it had thirsted for; and Holofernes, beheaded; and his Assyrians flying at his

[1] This is the passage from which it is conjectured that Dante knew what it was to "tremble in every vein," from the awful necessity of begging. Mr. Cary, with some other commentators, thinks that the "trembling" implies fear of being refused. But does it not rather mean the agony of the humiliation? In Salvani's case it certainly does; for it was in consideration of the pang to his pride, that the good deed rescued him from worse punishment.

death; and Troy, all become cinders and hollow places. Oh! what a fall from pride was there! Now, maintain the loftiness of your looks, ye sons of Eve, and walk with proud steps, bending not your eyes on the dust ye were, lest ye perceive the evil of your ways.[1]

"Behold," said Virgil, "there is an angel coming."

The angel came on, clad in white, with a face that sent trembling beams before it, like the morning star. He shewed the pilgrims the way up to the second circle; and then, beating his wings against the forehead of Dante, on which the seven initials of sin were written, told him he should go safely, and disappeared.

On reaching the new circle, Dante, instead of the fierce wailings that used to meet him at every turn in hell, heard voices singing, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."[2] As he went, he perceived

[1] The reader will have noticed the extraordinary mixture of Paganism and the Bible in this passage, especially the introduction of such fables as Niobe and Arachne. It would be difficult not to suppose it intended to work out some half sceptical purpose, if we did not call to mind the grave authority given to fables in the poet's treatise on Monarchy, and the whole strange spirit, at once logical and gratuitous, of the learning of his age, when the acuter the mind, the subtler became the reconcilement with absurdity.

[2] *Beati pauperes spiritu.* "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"—one of the beautiful passages of the beautiful sermon on the Mount. How could the great poet read and admire such passages, and yet fill his book so full of all which they renounced? "Oh," say his idolaters, "he did it out of his very love for them, and his impatience to see them triumph." So said the Inquisition. The evil was continued for the sake of the good which it prevented! The result in the long-run may be so, but not for the reasons they supposed, or from blindness to the indulgence of their bad passions.

that he walked lighter, and was told by Virgil that the angel had freed him from one of the letters on his forehead. He put his hand up to make sure, as a man does in the street when people take notice of something on his head of which he is not aware; and Virgil smiled.

In this new circle the sin of Envy was expiated. After the pilgrims had proceeded a mile, they heard the voices of invisible spirits passing them, uttering sentiments of love and charity; for it was charity itself that had to punish envy.

The souls of the envious, clad in sackcloth, sat leaning for support and humiliation, partly against the rocky wall of the circle, and partly on one another's shoulders, after the manner of beggars that ask alms near places of worship. Their eyes were sewn up, like those of hawks in training, but not so as to hinder them from shedding tears, which they did in abundance; and they cried, "Mary, pray for us!—Michael, Peter, and all the saints, pray for us!"

Dante spoke to them; and one, a female, lifted up her chin as a blind person does when expressing consciousness of notice, and said she was Sapia of Sienna, who used to be pleased at people's misfortunes, and had rejoiced when her countrymen lost the battle of Colle. "*Sapìa* was my name," she said, "but *sapient* I was not,[1] for I

[1] "*Sàvia* non fui, avvegna che *Sapìa*
Fosse chiamata."

The pun is poorer even than it sounds in English; for, though the Italian name may possibly remind its readers of *sapienza* (sapience), there is the difference of a *v* in the adjective *savia*, which is also accented on the first syllable. It is almost as bad as if she had said in English, "Sophist I

prayed God to defeat my countrymen; and when he had done so (as he had willed to do), I raised my bold face to heaven, and cried out to him, 'Now do thy worst, for I fear thee not!' I was like the bird in the fable, who thought the fine day was to last for ever. What I should have done in my latter days to make up for the imperfect amends of my repentance, I know not, if the holy Pierro Pettignano had not assisted me with his prayers. But who art thou that goest with open eyes, and breathest in thy talk?"

"Mine eyes," answered Dante, "may yet have to endure the blindness in this place, though for no long period. Far more do I fear the sufferings in the one that I have just left. I seem to feel the weight already upon me."[1]

The Florentine then informed Sapia how he came thither, which, she said, was a great sign that God loved him; and she begged his prayers. The

found myself, though Sophia is my name." It is pleasant, however, to see the great saturnine poet among the punsters. —It appears, from the commentators, that Sapia was in exile at the time of the battle; but they do not say for what; probably from some zeal of faction.

[1] We are here let into Dante's confessions. He owns to a little envy, but far more pride:

> "Gli occhi, diss' io, mi fieno ancor qui tolti,
> Ma picciol tempo; che poch' è l' offesa
> Fatta per esser con invidia volti.
>
> Troppa è più la paura ond' è sospesa
> L' anima mia del tormento di sotto:
> Che già lo 'ncarco di là giù mi pesa."

The first confession is singularly ingenuous and modest; the second, affecting. It is curious to guess what sort of persons Dante could have allowed himself to envy—probably those who were more acceptable to women.

conversation excited the curiosity of two spirits who overheard it; and one of them, Guido del Duca, a noble Romagnese, asked the poet of what country he was. Dante, without mentioning the name of the river, intimated that he came from the banks of the Arno; upon which the other spirit, Rinier da Calboli, asked his friend why the stranger suppressed the name, as though it was something horrible. Guido said he well might; for the river, throughout its course, beheld none but bad men and persecutors of virtue. First, he said, it made its petty way by the sties of those brutal hogs, the people of Casentino, and then arrived at the dignity of watering the kennels of the curs of Arezzo, who excelled more in barking than in biting; then, growing unluckier as it grew larger, like the cursed and miserable ditch that it was, it found in Florence the dogs become wolves; and finally, ere it went into the sea, it passed the den of those foxes, the Pisans, who were full of such cunning that they held traps in contempt.

"It will be well," continued Guido, "for this man to remember what he hears;" and then, after prophesying evil to Florence, and confessing to Dante his sin of envy, which used to make him pale when any one looked happy, he added, "This is Rinieri, the glory of that house of Calboli which now inherits not a spark of it. Not a spark of it, did I say, in the house of Calboli? Where is there a spark in all Romagna? Where is the good Lizio? —where Manardi, Traversaro, Carpigna? The Romagnese have all become bastards. A mechanic founds a house in Bologna! a Bernardin di Fosco finds his dog-grass become a tree in Faenza! Wonder not, Tuscan, to see me weep, when I

think of the noble spirits that we have lived with—of the Guidos of Prata, and the Ugolins of Azzo—of Federico Tignoso and his band—of the Traversaros and Anastagios, families now ruined—and all the ladies and the cavaliers, the alternate employments and delights which wrapped us in a round of love and courtesy, where now there is nothing but ill-will! O castle of Brettinoro! why dost thou not fall? Well has the lord of Bagnacavallo done, who will have no more children. Who would propagate a race of Counties from such blood as the Castrocaros and the Conios? Is not the son of Pagani called the Demon? and would it not be better that such a son were swept out of the family? Nay, let him live to shew to what a pitch of villainy it has arrived. Ubaldini alone is blest, for his name is good, and he is too old to leave a child after him. Go, Tuscan—go; for I would be left to my tears."

Dante and Virgil turned to move onward, and had scarcely done so, when a tremendous voice met them, splitting the air like peals of thunder, and crying out, "Whoever finds me will slay me!" then dashed apart, like the thunderbolt when it falls. It was Cain. The air had scarcely recovered its silence, when a second crash ensued from a different quarter near them, like thunder when the claps break swiftly into one another. "I am Aglauros," it said, "that was turned into stone." Dante drew closer to his guide, and there ensued a dead silence.[1]

[1] Aglauros, daughter of Cecrops, king of Athens, was turned to stone by Mercury, for disturbing with her envy his passion for her sister Herse.

The passage about Cain is one of the sublimest in Dante.

The sun was now in the west, and the pilgrims were journeying towards it, when Dante suddenly felt such a weight of splendour on his eyes, as forced him to screen them with both his hands. It was an angel coming to shew them the ascent to the next circle, a way that was less steep than the last. While mounting, they heard the angel's voice singing behind them, "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy!" and on his leaving them to proceed by themselves, the second letter on Dante's forehead was found to have been effaced by the splendour.

The poet looked round in wonder on the new circle, where the sin of Anger was expiated, and beheld, as in a dream, three successive spectacles illustrative of the virtue of patience. The first was that of a crowded temple, on the threshold of which a female said to her son, in the sweet manner of a mother, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing:"[1]—and here she became

Truly wonderful and characteristic is the way in which he has made physical noise and violence express the anguish of the wanderer's mind. We are not to suppose, I conceive, that we see Cain. We know he has passed us, by his thunderous and headlong words. Dante may well make him invisible, for his words are things—veritable thunderbolts.

Cain comes in rapid successions of thunder-claps. The voice of Aglauros is thunder-claps crashing into one another —broken thunder. This is exceedingly fine also, and wonderful as a variation upon that awful music; but Cain is the astonishment and the overwhelmingness. If it were not, however, for the second thunder, we should not have had the two silences; for I doubt whether they are not better even than one. At all events, the final silence is tremendous.

[1] St. Luke ii. 48.

silent, and the vision ended. The next was the lord of Athens, Pisistratus, calmly reproving his wife for wishing him to put to death her daughter's lover, who, in a transport, had embraced her in public. "If we are to be thus severe," said Pisistratus, "with those that love us, what is to be done with such as hate?" The last spectacle was that of a furious multitude shouting and stoning to death a youth, who, as he fell to the ground, still kept his face towards heaven, making his eyes the gates through which his soul reached it, and imploring forgiveness for his murderers.[1]

The visions passed away, leaving the poet staggering as if but half awake. They were succeeded by a thick and noisome fog, through which he followed his leader with the caution of a blind man, Virgil repeatedly telling him not to quit him a moment. Here they heard voices praying in unison for pardon to the "Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world." They were the spirits of the angry. Dante conversed with one of them on free-will and necessity; and after quitting him, and issuing by degrees from the cloud, beheld illustrative visions of anger; such as the impious mother, who was changed into the bird that most delights in singing; Haman, retaining his look of spite and rage on the cross; and Lavinia, mourning for her mother, who slew herself for rage at the death of Turnus.[2]

[1] The stoning of Stephen.

[2] These illustrative spectacles are not among the best inventions of Dante. Their introduction is forced, and the instances not always pointed. A murderess, too, of her son, changed into such a bird as the nightingale, was not a happy association of ideas in Homer, where Dante found it; and I

These visions were broken off by a great light, as sleep is broken; and Dante heard a voice out of it saying, "The ascent is here." He then, as Virgil and he ascended into the fourth circle, felt an air on his face, as if caused by the fanning of wings, accompanied by the utterance of the words, "Blessed are the peace-makers;" and his forehead was lightened of the third letter. [1]

In this fourth circle was expiated Lukewarmness, or defect of zeal for good. The sufferers came speeding and weeping round the mountain, making amends for the old indifference by the haste and fire of the new love that was in them. "Blessed Mary made haste," cried one, "to salute Elizabeth." "And Cæsar," cried another, "to smite Pompey at Lerida." [2] "And the disobedient among the Israelites," cried others, "died before they reached the promised land." "And the tired among the Trojans preferred ease in Sicily to glory in Latium."—It was now midnight, and Dante slept and had a dream.

His dream was of a woman who came to him, having a tongue that tried ineffectually to speak,

am surprised he made use of it, intimate as he must have been with the less inconsistent story of her namesake, Philomela, in the *Metamorphoses*.

[1] So, at least, I conceive, by what appears afterwards; and I may here add, once for all, that I have supplied the similar requisite intimations at each successive step in Purgatory, the poet seemingly having forgotten to do so. It is necessary to what he implied in the outset. The whole poem, it is to be remembered, is thought to have wanted his final revision.

[2] What an instance to put among those of haste to do good! But the fame and accomplishments of Cæsar, and his being at the head of our Ghibelline's beloved emperors, fairly overwhelmed Dante's boasted impartiality.

squinting eyes, feet whose distortion drew her towards the earth, stumps of hands, and a pallid face. Dante looked earnestly at her, and his look acted upon her like sunshine upon cold. Her tongue was loosened; her feet made straight; she stood upright; her paleness became a lovely rose-colour; and she warbled so beautifully, that the poet could not have refused to listen had he wished it.

"I am the sweet Syren," she said, "who made the mariners turn pale for pleasure in the sea. I drew Ulysses out of his course with my song; and he that harbours with me once, rarely departs ever, so well I pay him for what he abandons."

Her lips were not yet closed, when a lady of holy and earnest countenance came up to shame her. "O Virgil!" she cried angrily, "who is this?" Virgil approached, with his eyes fixed on the lady; and the lady tore away the garments of the woman, and shewed her to be a creature so loathly, that the sleeper awoke with the horror.[1]

Virgil said, "I have called thee three times to no purpose. Let us move, and find the place at which we are to go higher."

It was broad day, with a sun that came warm on the shoulders; and Dante was proceeding with his companion, when the softest voice they ever heard directed them where to ascend, and they found an angel with them, who pointed his swan-like wings upward, and then flapped them against the pilgrims, taking away the fourth letter from

[1] A masterly allegory of Worldly Pleasure. But the close of it in the original has an intensity of the revolting, which outrages the last recesses of feeling, and disgusts us with the denouncer.

the forehead of Dante. "Blessed are they that mourn," said the angel, "for they shall be comforted."

The pilgrims ascended into the fifth circle, and beheld the expiators of Avarice grovelling on the ground, and exclaiming, as loud as they could for the tears that choked them, "My soul hath cleaved to the dust." Dante spoke to one, who turned out to be Pope Adrian the Fifth. The poet fell on his knees; but Adrian bade him arise and err not. "I am no longer," said he, "spouse of the Church, here; but fellow-servant with thee and with all others. Go thy ways, and delay not the time of my deliverance."

The pilgrims moving onward, Dante heard a spirit exclaim, in the struggling tones of a woman in child-bed, "O blessed Virgin! That was a poor roof thou hadst when thou wast delivered of thy sacred burden. O good Fabricius! Virtue with poverty was thy choice, and not vice with riches." And then it told the story of Nicholas, who, hearing that a father was about to sacrifice the honour of his three daughters for want of money, threw bags of it in at his window, containing portions for them all.

Dante earnestly addressed this spirit to know who he was; and the spirit said it would tell him, not for the sake of help, for which it looked elsewhere, but because of the shining grace that was in his questioner, though yet alive.

"I was root," said the spirit, "of that evil plant which overshadows all Christendom to such little profit. Hugh Capet was I, ancestor of the Philips and Louises of France, offspring of a butcher of Paris, when the old race of kings was

worn out.[1] We began by seizing the government in Paris; then plundered in Provence; then, to make amends, laid hold of Poitou, Normandy, and Gascony; then, still to make amends, put Conradin to death and seized Naples; then, always to make amends, gave Saint Aquinas his dismissal to Heaven by poison. I see the time at hand when a descendant of mine will be called into Italy, and the spear that Judas *jousted with*[2] shall transfix the bowels of Florence. Another of my posterity sells his daughter for a sum of money to a Marquis of Ferrara. Another seizes the pope in Alagna, and mocks Christ over again in the person of his Vicar. A fourth rends the veil of the temple,

[1] The fierce Hugh Capet, soliloquising about the Virgin in the tones of a lady in child-bed, is rather too ludicrous an association of ideas. It was for calling this prince the son of a butcher, that Francis the First prohibited the admission of Dante's poem into his dominions. Mr. Cary thinks the king might have been mistaken in his interpretation of the passage, and that "butcher" may be simply a metaphorical term for the blood-thirstiness of Capet's father. But when we find the man called, not *the* butcher, or *that* butcher, or butcher in reference to his species, but in plain local parlance "a butcher of Paris" (*un beccaio di Parigi*), and when this designation is followed up by the allusion to the extinction of the previous dynasty, the ordinary construction of the words appears indisputable. Dante seems to have had no ground for what his aristocratical pride doubtless considered a hard blow, and what King Francis, indeed, condescended to feel as such. He met with the notion somewhere, and chose to believe it, in order to vex the French and their princes. The spirit of the taunt contradicts his own theories elsewhere; for he has repeatedly said, that the only true nobility is in the mind. But his writings (poetical truth excepted) are a heap of contradictions.

[2] Mr. Cary thought he had seen an old romance in which there is a combat of this kind between Jesus and his betrayer. I have an impression to the same effect.

solely to seize its money. O Lord, how shall I rejoice to see the vengeance which even now thou huggest in delight to thy bosom ![1]

"Of loving and liberal things," continued Capet, "we speak while it is light; such as thou heardest me record, when I addressed myself to the blessed Virgin. But when night comes, we take another tone. Then we denounce Pygmalion,[2] the traitor, the robber, and the parricide, each the result of his gluttonous love of gold; and Midas, who obtained his wish, to the laughter of all time; and the thief Achan, who still seems frightened at the wrath of Joshua; and Sapphira and her husband, whom we accuse over again before the Apostles; and Heliodorus, whom we bless the hoofs of the angel's horse for trampling;[3] and Crassus, on whom we call with shouts of derision to tell us the

1 "O Signor mio, quando sarò io lieto
A veder la vendetta che nascosa
Fa dolce l' ira tua nel tuo segreto !"

The spirit of the blasphemous witticism attributed to another Italian, viz. that the reason why God prohibited revenge to mankind was its being "too delicate a morsel for any but himself," is here gravely anticipated as a positive compliment to God by the fierce poet of the thirteenth century, who has been held up as a great Christian divine! God hugs revenge to his bosom with delight! The Supreme Being confounded with a poor grinning Florentine!

[2] A ludicrous anti-climax this to modern ears! The allusion is to the Pygmalion who was Dido's brother, and who murdered her husband, the priest Sichæus, for his riches. The term "parricide" is here applied in its secondary sense of—the murderer of any one to whom we owe reverence.

[3] Heliodorus was a plunderer of the Temple, thus supernaturally punished. The subject has been nobly treated by Raphael.

flavour of his molten gold. Thus we record our thoughts in the night-time, now high, now low, now at greater or less length, as each man is prompted by his impulses. And it was thus thou didst hear me recording also by day-time, though I had no respondent near me."

The pilgrims quitted Hugh Capet, and were eagerly pursuing their journey, when, to the terror of Dante, they felt the whole mountain of Purgatory tremble, as though it were about to fall in. The island of Delos shook not so awfully when Latona, hiding there, brought forth the twin eyes of Heaven. A shout then arose on every side, so enormous, that Virgil stood nigher to his companion, and bade him be of good heart. "Glory be to God in the highest," cried the shout; but Dante could gather the words only from those who were near him.

It was Purgatory rejoicing for the deliverance of a soul out of its bounds.[1]

The soul overtook the pilgrims as they were journeying in amazement onwards; and it turned out to be that of Statius, who had been converted to Christianity in the reign of Domitian.[2] Mutual astonishment led to inquiries that explained who the other Latin poet was; and Statius fell at his master's feet.

Statius had expiated his sins in the circle of Avarice, not for that vice, but for the opposite one of Prodigality.

[1] A grand and beautiful fiction.

[2] Readers need hardly be told that there is no foundation for this fancy, except in the invention of the churchmen. Dante, in another passage, not necessary to give, confounds the poet Statius who was from Naples, with a rhetorician of the same name from Toulouse.

An angel now, as before, took the fifth letter from Dante's forehead; and the three poets having ascended into the sixth round of the mountain, were journeying on lovingly together, Dante listening with reverence to the talk of the two ancients, when they came up to a sweet-smelling fruit-tree, upon which a clear stream came tumbling from a rock beside it, and diffusing itself through the branches. The Latin poets went up to the tree, and were met by a voice which said, "Be chary of the fruit. Mary thought not of herself at Galilee, but of the visitors, when she said, 'They have no wine.' The women of oldest Rome drank water. The beautiful age of gold feasted on acorns. Its thirst made nectar out of the rivulet. The Baptist fed on locusts and wild honey, and became great as you see him in the gospel."

The poets went on their way; and Dante was still listening to the others, when they heard behind them a mingled sound of chanting and weeping, which produced an effect at once sad and delightful. It was the psalm, "O Lord, open thou our lips!" and the chanters were expiators of the sin of intemperance in Meats and Drinks. They were condemned to circuit the mountain, famished, and to long for the fruit and waters of the tree in vain. They soon came up with the poets—a pallid multitude, with hollow eyes, and bones staring through the skin. The sockets of their eyes looked like rings from which the gems had dropped.[1] One

[1] "Parèn l' occhiaje anella senza gemme."

This beautiful and affecting image is followed in the original by one of the most fantastical conceits of the time. The poet says, that the physiognomist who "reads the word

of them knew and accosted Dante, who could not recognise him till he heard him speak. It was Forese Donati, one of the poet's most intimate connexions. Dante, who had wept over his face when dead, could as little forbear weeping to see him thus hungering and thirsting, though he had expected to find him in the outskirts of the place, among the delayers of repentance. He asked his friend how he had so quickly got higher. Forese said it was owing to the prayers and tears of his good wife Nella; and then he burst into a strain of indignation against the contrast exhibited to her virtue by the general depravity of the Florentine women, whom he described as less modest than the half-naked savages in the mountains of Sardinia.

"What is to be said of such creatures?" continued he. "O my dear cousin! I see a day at hand, when these impudent women shall be forbidden from the pulpit to go exposing their naked bosoms. What savages or what infidels ever needed that? Oh! if they could see what Heaven has in store for them, their mouths would be this instant opened wide for howling."[1]

OMO (*homo*, man), written in the face of the human being, might easily have seen the letter *m* in theirs."

"Chi nel viso de gli uomini legge *o m o*,
Bene avria quivi conosciuto l' *emme*."

The meaning is, that the perpendicular lines of the nose and temples form the letter M, and the eyes two O's. The enthusiast for Roman domination must have been delighted to find that Nature wrote in Latin!

[1] "Se le svergognate fosser certe
Di quel che l' ciel veloce loro ammanna,
Già per urlare avrian le bocche aperte."

This will remind the reader of the style of that gentle

Forese then asked Dante to explain to himself and his astonished fellow-sufferers how it was that he stood there, a living body of flesh and blood, casting a shadow with his substance.

"If thou callest to mind," said Dante, "what sort of life thou and I led together, the recollection may still grieve thee sorely. He that walks here before us took me out of that life; and through his guidance it is that I have visited in the body the world of the dead, and am now traversing the mountain which leads us to the right path."[1]

Christian, John Knox, who, instead of offering his own "cheek to the smiters," delighted to smite the cheeks of women. Fury was his mode of preaching meekness, and threats of everlasting howling his reproof of a tune on Sundays. But, it will be said, he looked to consequences. Yes; and produced the worst himself, both spiritual and temporal. Let the whisky-shops answer him. However, he helped to save Scotland from Purgatory: so we must take good and bad together, and hope the best in the end.

Forese, like many of Dante's preachers, seems to have been one of those self-ignorant or self-exasperated denouncers, who

> "Compound for sins they are inclined to,
> By damning those they have no mind to."

He was a glutton, who could not bear to see ladies too little clothed. The defacing of "God's image" in his own person he considered nothing.

[1] The passage respecting his past life is unequivocal testimony to the fact, confidently disputed by some, of Dante's having availed himself of the license of the time; though, in justice to such candour, we are bound not to think worse of it than can be helped. The words in the original are:

> "Se ti riduci a mente
> Qual fosti meco, e quale io teco fui,
> Ancor fia grave il memorar presente."

Literally: "If thou recallest to mind what (sort of person)

After some further explanation, Forese pointed out to his friend, among the expiators of intemperance, Buonaggiunta of Lucca, the poet; and Pope Martin the Fourth, with a face made sharper than the rest for the eels which he used to smother in wine; and Ubaldino of Pila, grinding his teeth on air; and Archbishop Boniface of Ravenna, who fed jovially on his flock; and Rigogliosi of Forli, who had had time enough to drink in the other world, and yet never was satisfied. Buonaggiunta and Dante eyed one another with curiosity; and the former murmured something about a lady of the name of Gentucca.

"Thou seemest to wish to speak with me," said Dante.

"Thou art no admirer, I believe, of my native place," said Buonaggiunta; "and yet, if thou art he whom I take thee to be, there is a damsel there shall make it please thee. Art thou not author of the poem beginning

"Ladies, that understand the lore of love"?[1]

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thou wast with me, and what I was with thee, the recollection may oppress thee still."

His having been taken out of that kind of life by Virgil (construed in the literal sense, in which, among other senses, he has directed us to construe him), may imply, either that he delight of reading Virgil first made him think of living in a manner more becoming a man of intellect, or (possibly) that the Latin poet's description of Æneas's descent into hell turned his thoughts to religious penitence. Be this as it may, his life, though surely it could at no time have been of any very licentious kind, never, if we are to believe Boccaccio, became spotless.

[1] The mention of Gentucca might be thought a compliment to the lady, if Dante had not made Beatrice afterwards treat his regard for any one else but herself with so much con-

"I am one," replied Dante, "who writes as Love would have him, heeding no manner but his dictator's, and uttering simply what he suggests."[1]

"Ay, that is the sweet new style," returned Buonaggiunta; "and I now see what it was that hindered the notary, and Guittone, and myself, from hitting the right natural point." And here he ceased speaking, looking like one contented to have ascertained a truth.[2]

The whole multitude then, except Forese, skimmed away like cranes, swift alike through

tempt. (See page 168 of the present volume.) Under that circumstance, it is hardly acting like a gentleman to speak of her at all; unless, indeed, he thought her a person who would be pleased with the notoriety arising even from the record of a fugitive regard; and in that case the good taste of the record would still remain doubtful. The probability seems to be, that Dante was resolved, at all events, to take this opportunity of bearding some rumour.

[1] A celebrated and charming passage:

"Io mi son un, che quando
Amore spira, noto; e a quel modo
Che detta dentro, vo significando."

I am one that notes
When Love inspires; and what he speaks I tell
In his own way, embodying but his thoughts.

[2] Exquisite truth of painting! and a very elegant compliment to the handsome nature of Buonaggiunta. Jacopo da Lentino, called the Notary, and Fra Guittone of Arezzo, were celebrated verse-writers of the day. The latter, in a sonnet given by Mr. Cary in the notes to his translation, says he shall be delighted to hear the trumpet, at the last day, dividing mankind into the happy and the tormented (sufferers under *crudel martire*) *because* an inscription will then be seen on his forehead, shewing that he had been a slave to love! An odd way for a poet to shew his feelings, and a friar his religion!

eagerness and through leanness. Forese lingered a moment to have a parting word with his friend, and to prophesy the violent end of the chief of his family, Corso, run away with and dragged at the heels of his horse faster and faster, till the frenzied animal smites him dead. Having given the poet this information, the prophet speeded after the others.

The companions now came to a second fruit-tree, to which a multitude were in vain lifting up their hands, just as children lift them to a man who tantalises them with shewing something which he withholds; but a voice out of a thicket by the roadside warned the travellers not to stop, telling them that the tree was an offset from that of which Eve tasted. "Call to mind," said the voice, "those creatures of the clouds, the Centaurs, whose feasting cost them their lives. Remember the Hebrews, how they dropped away from the ranks of Gideon to quench their effeminate thirst."[1]

The poets proceeded, wrapt in thought, till they heard another voice of a nature that made Dante start and shake as if he had been some paltry hackney.

"Of what value is thought," said the voice, "if it lose its way? The path lies hither."

Dante turned toward the voice, and beheld a shape glowing red as in a furnace, with a visage too dazzling to be looked upon. It met him, nevertheless, as he drew nigh, with an air from the fanning of its wings fresh as the first breathing of the wind on a May morning, and fragrant as all its

[1] Judges vii. 6.

flowers; and Dante lost the sixth letter on his forehead, and ascended with the two other poets into the seventh and last circle of the mountain.

This circle was all in flames, except a narrow path on the edge of its precipice, along which the pilgrims walked. A great wind from outside of the precipice kept the flames from raging beyond the path; and in the midst of the fire went spirits expiating the sin of Incontinence. They sang the hymn beginning "God of consummate mercy!"[1] Dante was compelled to divide his attention between his own footsteps and theirs, in order to move without destruction. At the close of the hymn they cried aloud, "I know not a man!"[2] and then recommenced it; after which they again cried aloud, saying, "Diana ran to the wood, and drove Calisto out of it, because she knew the poison of Venus!" And then again they sang the hymn, and then extolled the memories of chaste women and husbands; and so they went on without ceasing, as long as their time of trial lasted.

Occasionally the multitude that went in one direction met another which mingled with and passed through it, individuals of both greeting

[1] *Summæ Deus clementiæ.* The ancient beginning of a hymn in the Roman Catholic church; now altered, say the commentators, to "Summæ parens clementiæ."

[2] *Virum non cognosco.* "Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"—Luke i. 34. The placing of Mary's interview with the angel, and Ovid's story of Calisto, upon apparently the same identical footing of authority, by spirits in all the sincerity of agonised penitence, is very remarkable. A dissertation, by some competent antiquary, on the curious question suggested by these anomalies, would be a welcome novelty in the world of letters.

tenderly by the way, as emmets appear to do, when in passing they touch the antennæ of one another. These two multitudes parted with loud and sorrowful cries, proclaiming the offences of which they had been guilty; and then each renewed their spiritual songs and prayers.

The souls here, as in former circles, knew Dante to be a living creature by the shadow which he cast; and after the wonted explanations, he learned who some of them were. One was his predecessor in poetry, Guido Guinicelli, from whom he could not take his eyes for love and reverence, till the sufferer, who told him there was a greater than himself in the crowd, vanished away through the fire as a fish does in water. The greater one was Arnauld Daniel, the Provençal poet, who, after begging the prayers of the traveller, disappeared in like manner.

The sun by this time was setting on the fires of Purgatory, when an angel came crossing the road through them, and then, standing on the edge of the precipice, with joy in his looks, and singing, "Blessed are the pure in heart!" invited the three poets to plunge into the flames themselves, and so cross the road to the ascent by which the summit of the mountain was gained. Dante, clasping his hands, and raising them aloft, recoiled in horror. The thought of all that he had just witnessed made him feel as if his own hour of death was come. His companion encouraged him to obey the angel; but he could not stir. Virgil said, "Now mark me, son; this is the only remaining obstacle between thee and Beatrice;" and then himself and Statius entering the fire, Dante followed them.

"I could have cast myself," said he, "into

molten glass to cool myself, so raging was th furnace."

Virgil talked of Beatrice to animate him. He said, "Methinks I see her eyes beholding us." There was, indeed, a great light upon the quarter to which they were crossing; and out of the light issued a voice, which drew them onwards, singing, "Come, blessed of my Father! Behold, the sun is going down, and the night cometh, and the ascent is to be gained."

The travellers gained the ascent, issuing out of the fire; and the voice and the light ceased, and night was come. Unable to ascend further in the darkness, they made themselves a bed, each of a stair in the rock; and Dante, in his happy humility, felt as if he had been a goat lying down for the night near two shepherds.

Towards dawn, at the hour of the rising of the star of love, he had a dream, in which he saw a young and beautiful lady coming over a lea, and bending every now and then to gather flowers; and as she bound the flowers into a garland, she sang, "I am Leah, gathering flowers to adorn myself, that my looks may seem pleasant to me in the mirror. But my sister Rachel abides before the mirror, flowerless; contented with her beautiful eyes. To behold is my sister's pleasure, and to work is mine."[1]

[1] An allegory of the Active and Contemplative Life;—not, I think, a happy one, though beautifully painted. It presents, apart from its terminating comment, no necessary intellectual suggestion; is rendered, by the comment itself, hardly consistent with Leah's express love of ornament; and, if it were not for the last sentence, might be taken for a picture of two different forms of Vanity.

When Dante awoke, the beams of the dawn were visible; and they now produced a happiness like that of the traveller, who every time he awakes knows himself to be nearer home. Virgil and Statius were already up; and all three, resuming their way to the mountain's top, stood upon it at last, and gazed round about them on the skirts of the terrestrial Paradise. The sun was sparkling bright over a green land, full of trees and flowers. Virgil then announced to Dante, that here his guidance terminated, and that the creature of flesh and blood was at length to be master of his own movements, to rest or to wander as he pleased, the tried and purified lord over himself.

The Florentine, eager to taste his new liberty, left his companions awhile, and strolled away through the celestial forest, whose thick and lively verdure gave coolness to the senses in the midst of the brightest sun. A fragrance came from every part of the soil; a sweet unintermitting air streamed against the walker's face; and as the full-hearted birds, warbling on all sides, welcomed the morning's radiance into the trees, the trees themselves joined in the concert with a swelling breath, like that which rises among the pines of Chiassi, when Eolus lets loose the south wind, and the gathering melody comes rolling through the forest from bough to bough.[1]

[1] "Tal, qual di ramo in ramo si raccoglie
Per la pineta in sul lito di Chiassi,
Quand' Eolo scirocco fuor discioglie."

"Even as from branch to branch
Along the piny forests on the shore
Of Chiassi, rolls the gathering melody,

Dante had proceeded far enough to lose sight of the point at which he entered, when he found himself on the bank of a rivulet, compared with whose crystal purity the limpidest waters on earth were clouded. And yet it flowed under a perpetual depth of shade, which no beam either of sun or moon penetrated. Nevertheless the darkness was coloured with endless diversities of May-blossoms; and the poet was standing in admiration, looking up at it along its course, when he beheld something that took away every other thought; to wit, a lady, all alone, on the other side of the water, singing and culling flowers.

"Ah, lady!" said the poet, "who, to judge by the cordial beauty in thy looks, hast a heart overflowing with love, be pleased to draw thee nearer to the stream, that I may understand the words thou singest. Thou remindest me of Proserpine, of the place she was straying in, and of what sort of creature she looked, when her mother lost her, and she herself lost the spring-time on earth."

As a lady turns in the dance when it goes smoothest, moving round with lovely self-possession, and scarcely seeming to put one foot before the other, so turned the lady towards the water over the yellow and vermilion flowers, dropping

When Eolus hath from his cavern loosed
The dripping south."—*Cary.*

"This is the wood," says Mr. Cary, "where the scene of Boccaccio's sublimest story (taken entirely from Elinaud, as I learn in the notes to the *Decameron*, ediz. Giunti, 1573, p. 62) is laid. See *Dec.*, G. 5, N. 8, and Dryden's *Theodore and Honoria*. Our poet perhaps wandered in it during his abode with Guido Novello da Polenta."—*Translation of Dante*, ut sup. p. 121.

her eyes gently as she came, and singing so that Dante could hear her. Then when she arrived at the water, she stopped, and raised her eyes towards him, and smiled, shewing him the flowers in her hands, and shifting them with her fingers into a display of all their beauties. Never were such eyes beheld, not even when Venus herself was in love. The stream was a little stream; yet Dante felt it as great an intervention between them, as if it had been Leander's Hellespont.

The lady explained to him the nature of the place, and how the rivulet was the Lethe of Paradise;—Lethe, where he stood, but called Eunoe higher up; the drink of the one doing away all remembrance of evil deeds, and that of the other restoring all remembrance of good.[1] It was the region, she said, in which Adam and Eve had lived; and the poets had beheld it perhaps in their dreams on Mount Parnassus, and hence imagined their golden age;—and at these words she looked at Virgil and Statius, who by this time had come up, and who stood smiling at her kindly words.

Resuming her song, the lady turned and passed up along the rivulet the contrary way of the stream, Dante proceeding at the same rate of time on his side of it; till on a sudden she cried, "Behold, and listen!" and a light of exceeding lustre came streaming through the woods, followed by a dulcet melody. The poets resumed their way in a rapture of expectation, and saw the air before them glowing under the green boughs like fire. A divine spectacle ensued of holy mystery, with

[1] Lethe, *Forgetfulness;* Eunoe, *Well-mindedness.*

evangelical and apocalyptic images, which gradually gave way and disclosed a car brighter than the chariot of the sun, accompanied by celestial nymphs, and showered upon by angels with a cloud of flowers, in the midst of which stood a maiden in a white veil, crowned with olive.

The love that had never left Dante's heart from childhood told him who it was; and trembling in every vein, he turned round to Virgil for encouragement. Virgil was gone. At that moment, Paradise and Beatrice herself could not requite the pilgrim for the loss of his friend; and the tears ran down his cheeks.

"Dante," said the veiled maiden across the stream, "weep not that Virgil leaves thee. Weep thou not yet. The stroke of a sharper sword is coming, at which it will behove thee to weep." Then assuming a sterner attitude, and speaking in the tone of one who reserves the bitterest speech for the last, she added, "Observe me well. I am, as thou suspectest, Beatrice indeed;—Beatrice, who has to congratulate thee on deigning to seek the mountain at last. And hadst thou so long indeed to learn, that here only can man be happy?"

Dante, casting down his eyes at these words, beheld his face in the water, and hastily turned aside, he saw it so full of shame.

Beatrice had the dignified manner of an offended parent; such a flavour of bitterness was mingled with her pity.

She held her peace; and the angels abruptly began singing, "In thee, O Lord, have I put my trust;" but went no farther in the psalm than the words, "Thou hast set my feet in a large

room." The tears of Dante had hitherto been suppressed; but when the singing began, they again rolled down his cheeks.

Beatrice, in a milder tone, said to the angels, "This man, when he proposed to himself in his youth to lead a new life, was of a truth so gifted, that every good habit ought to have thrived with him; but the richer the soil, the greater peril of weeds. For a while, the innocent light of my countenance drew him the right way; but when I quitted mortal life, he took away his thoughts from remembrance of me, and gave himself to others. When I had risen from flesh to spirit, and increased in worth and beauty, then did I sink in his estimation, and he turned into other paths, and pursued false images of good that never keep their promise. In vain I obtained from Heaven the power of interfering in his behalf, and endeavoured to affect him with it night and day. So little was he concerned, and into such depths he fell, that nothing remained but to shew him the state of the condemned; and therefore I went to their outer regions, and commended him with tears to the guide that brought him hither. The decrees of Heaven would be nought, if Lethe could be passed, and the fruit beyond it tasted, without any payment of remorse.[1]

[1] "Senza alcuno scotto
Di pentimento."

Literally, *scot-free.*—"Scotto," scot;—"payment for dinner or supper in a tavern" (says Rubbi, the Petrarchal rather than Dantesque editor of the *Parnaso Italiano*, and a very summary gentleman); "here used figuratively, though it is not a word fit to be employed on serious and grand occasions" (in cose gravi ed illustri). See his "Dante" in that collection, vol. ii. p. 297.

"O thou," she continued, addressing herself to Dante, "who standest on the other side of the holy stream, say, have I not spoken truth?"

Dante was so confused and penitent, that the words failed as they passed his lips.

"What could induce thee," resumed his monitress, "when I had given thee aims indeed, to abandon them for objects that could end in nothing?"

Dante said, "Thy face was taken from me, and the presence of false pleasure led me astray."

"Never didst thou behold," cried the maiden, "loveliness like mine; and if bliss failed thee because of my death, how couldst thou be allured by mortal inferiority? That first blow should have taught thee to disdain all perishable things, and aspire after the soul that had gone before thee. How could thy spirit endure to stoop to further chances, or to a childish girl, or any other fleeting vanity? The bird that is newly out of the nest may be twice or thrice tempted by the snare; but in vain, surely, is the net spread in sight of one that is older."[1]

[1] The allusion to the childish girl (*pargoletta*) or any other fleeting vanity,

"O altra vanità con si breve uso,"

is not handsome. It was not the fault of the childish girls that he liked them; and he should not have taunted them, whatever else they might have been. What answer could they make to the great poet?

Nor does Beatrice make a good figure throughout this scene, whether as a woman or an allegory. If she is Theology, or Heavenly Grace, &c., the sternness of the allegory should not have been put into female shape; and when she is to be taken in her literal sense (as the poet also tells us she is), her treatment of the poor submissive lover, with leave of

Dante stood as silent and abashed as a sorry child.

"If but to hear me," said Beatrice, "thus afflicts thee, lift up thy beard, and see what sight can do."

Dante, though feeling the sting intended by the word "beard," did as he was desired. The angels had ceased to scatter their clouds of flowers about the maiden; and he beheld her, though still beneath her veil, as far surpassing her former self in loveliness, as that self had surpassed others. The sight pierced him with such pangs, that the more he had loved anything else, the more he now loathed it; and he fell senseless to the ground.

When he recovered his senses, he found himself in the hands of the lady he had first seen in the place, who bidding him keep firm hold of her, drew him into the river Lethe, and so through and across it to the other side, speeding as she went like a weaver's shuttle, and immersing him when she arrived, the angels all the while singing, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."[1]

Signor Rubbi, is no better than *snubbing*;—to say nothing of the vanity with which she pays compliments to her own beauty.

I must, furthermore, beg leave to differ with the poet's thinking it an exalted symptom on his part to hate everything he had loved before, out of supposed compliment to the transcendental object of his affections and his own awakened merits. All the heights of love and wisdom terminate in charity; and charity, by very reason of its knowing the poorness of so many things, hates nothing. Besides, it is anything but handsome or high-minded to turn round upon objects whom we have helped to lower with our own gratified passions, and pretend a right to scorn them.

[1] "Tu asperges me, et mundabor," &c. "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."—Psalm li. 7.

She then delivered him into the hands of the nymphs that had danced about the car,—nymphs on earth, but stars and cardinal virtues in heaven; a song burst from the lips of the angels; and Faith, Hope, and Charity, calling upon Beatrice to unveil her face, she did so; and Dante quenched the ten-years' thirst of his eyes in her ineffable beauty.[1]

After a while he and Statius were made thoroughly regenerate with the waters of Eunoe; and he felt pure with a new being, and fit to soar into the stars.

[1] Beatrice had been dead ten years.

III

THE JOURNEY THROUGH HEAVEN

ARGUMENT

THE Paradise or Heaven of Dante, in whose time the received system of astronomy was the Ptolemaic, consists of the Seven successive Planets according to that system, or the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn; of the Eighth Sphere beyond these, or that of the Fixed Stars; of the Primum Mobile, or First Mover of them all round the moveless Earth; and of the Empyrean, or Region of Pure Light, in which is the Beatific Vision. Each of these ascending spheres is occupied by its proportionate degree of Faith and Virtue; and Dante visits each under the guidance of Beatrice, receiving many lessons, as he goes, on theological and other subjects (here left out), and being finally admitted, after the sight of Christ and the Virgin, to a glimpse of the Great First Cause.

T was evening now on earth, and morning on the top of the hill in Purgatory, when Beatrice having fixed her eyes upon the sun, Dante fixed his eyes upon hers, and suddenly found himself in Heaven.

He had been transported by the attraction of love, and Beatrice was by his side.

The poet beheld from where he stood the blaze of the empyrean, and heard the music of the spheres; yet he was only in the first or lowest Heaven, the circle of the orb of the moon.

This orb, with his new guide, he proceeded to enter. It had seemed, outside, as solid, though as lucid, as diamond; yet they entered it, as sunbeams are admitted into water, without dividing the substance. It now appeared, as it enclosed them, like a pearl, through the essence of which they saw but dimly; and they beheld many faces eagerly looking at them, as if about to speak, but not more distinct from the surrounding whiteness than pearls themselves are from the forehead they adorn.[1] Dante thought them only reflected faces, and turned round to see to whom they belonged, when his smiling companion set him right; and he entered into discourse with the spirit that seemed the most anxious to accost him. It was Piccarda, the sister of his friend Forese Donati, whom he had met in the sixth region of Purgatory. He did not know her, by reason of her wonderful increase in beauty. She and her associates were such as had been Vowed to a Life of Chastity and Religion, but had been Compelled by Others to Break their Vows. This had been done, in Piccarda's instance, by her brother Corso.[2] On

[1] A curious and happy image.

"Tornan de' nostri visi le postille
Debili sì, che perla in bianca fronte
Non vien men tosto a le nostre pupille:
Tali vid' io più facce a parlar pronte."

[2] "Rodolfo da Tossignano, *Hist. Seraph. Relig.* P. i. p. 138, as cited by Lombardi, relates the following legend of Piccarda: 'Her brother Corso, inflamed with rage against

Dante's asking if they did not long for a higher state of bliss, she and her sister-spirits gently smiled; and then answered, with faces as happy as first love,[1] that they willed only what it pleased God to give them, and therefore were truly blest. The poet found by this answer, that every place in Heaven was Paradise, though the bliss might be of different degrees. Piccarda then shewed him the spirit at her side, lustrous with all the glory of the region, Costanza, daughter of the king of Sicily, who had been forced out of the cloister to become the wife of the Emperor Henry. Having given him this information, she began singing *Ave Maria;* and, while singing, disappeared with the rest, as substances disappear in water.[2]

his virgin sister, having joined with him Farinata, an infamous assassin, and twelve other abandoned ruffians, entered the monastery by a ladder, and carried away his sister forcibly to his own house; and then, tearing off her religious habit, compelled her to go in a secular garment to her nuptials. Before the spouse of Christ came together with her new husband, she knelt down before a crucifix, and recommended her virginity to Christ. Soon after, her whole body was smitten with leprosy, so as to strike grief and horror into the beholders; and thus, in a few days, through the divine disposal, she passed with a palm of virginity to the Lord. Perhaps (adds the worthy Franciscan), our poet not being able to certify himself entirely of this occurrence, has chosen to pass it over discreetly, by making Piccarda say, 'God knows how, after that, my life was framed.'"—Cary, ut sup. p. 137.

[1] A lovely simile indeed.

"Tanto lieta
Ch' arder parea d' amor nel primo foco."

[2] Costanza, daughter of Ruggieri, king of Sicily, thus taken out of the monastery, was mother to the Emperor

A loving will transported the two companions, as before, to the next circle of Heaven, where they found themselves in the planet Mercury, the residence of those who had acted rather out of Desire of Fame than Love of God. The spirits here, as in the former Heaven, crowded towards them, as fish in a clear pond crowd to the hand that offers them food. Their eyes sparkled with celestial joy; and the more they thought of their joy, the brighter they grew; till one of them who addressed the poet became indistinguishable for excess of splendour. It was the soul of the Emperor Justinian. Justinian told him the whole story of the Roman empire up to his time; and then gave an account of one of his associates in bliss, Romèo, who had been minister to Raymond Beranger, Count of Provence. Four daughters had been born to Raymond Beranger, and every one became a queen; and all this had been brought about by Romèo, a poor stranger from another country. The courtiers, envying Romèo, incited Raymond to demand of him an account of his stewardship, though he had brought his master's treasury twelvefold for every ten it disbursed. Romèo quitted the court, poor and old; "and if the world," said Justinian, "could know the heart such a man must have had, begging his bread as he went, crust by crust—praise him

Frederick the Second. "She was fifty years old or more at the time" (says Mr. Cary, quoting from Muratori and others); "and because it was not credited that she could have a child at that age, she was delivered in a pavilion; and it was given out, that any lady who pleased was at liberty to see her. Many came and saw her, and the suspicion ceased."—*Translation of Dante*, ut sup. p. 137.

as it does, it would praise him a great deal more."[1]

> "Hosanna, Holy God of Sabaoth,
> Superillumining with light of light
> The happy fires of these thy Malahoth!"[2]

Thus began singing the soul of the Emperor Justinian; and then, turning as he sang, vanished with those about him, like sparks of fire.

Dante now found himself, before he was aware, in the third Heaven, or planet Venus, the abode of the Amorous.[3] He only knew it by the increased loveliness in the face of his companion.

The spirits in this orb, who came and went in the light of it like sparks in fire, or like voices chanting in harmony with voice, were spun round in circles of delight, each with more or less swiftness, according to its share of the beatific vision. Several of them came sweeping out of their dance towards the poet who had sung of Love, among whom was his patron, Charles Martel, king of Hungary, who shewed him the reason why diversities of natures must occur in families; and Cunizza, sister of the tyrant Ezzelino, who was overcome by this her star when on earth; and Folco the Troubadour, whose place was next Cunizza in Heaven; and Rahab the harlot, who favoured the entrance of the Jews into the Holy Land, and

[1] Probably an allusion to Dante's own wanderings.

[2] "Hosanna Sanctus Deus Sabaoth
Superillustrans claritate tuâ
Felices ignes horum Malahoth."

Malahoth; Hebrew, *kingdoms.*

[3] The epithet is not too strong, as will be seen by the nature of the inhabitants.

whose place was next Folco.[1] Cunizza said that she did not at all regret a lot which carried her no higher, whatever the vulgar might think of such an opinion. She spoke of the glories of the jewel who was close to her,—Folco—contrasted his zeal with the inertness of her contemptible countrymen —and foretold the bloodshed that awaited the latter from wars and treacheries. The Troubadour, meanwhile, glowed in his aspect like a ruby stricken with the sun; for in heaven joy is expressed by effulgence, as on earth by laughter. He confessed

[1] Charles Martel, son of the king of Naples and Sicily, and crowned king of Hungary, seems to have become acquainted with Dante during the poet's youth, when the prince met his royal father in the city of Florence. He was brother of Robert, who succeeded the father, and who was the friend of Petrarch.

"The adventures of Cunizza, overcome by the influence of her star," says Cary, "are related by the chronicler Rolandino of Padua, lib. i. cap. 3, in Muratori, *Rer. Ital. Script.* tom. viii. p. 173. She eloped from her first husband, Richard of St. Boniface, in the company of Sordello (see *Purg.* canto vi. and vii.), with whom she is supposed to have cohabited before her marriage; then lived with a soldier of Trevigi, whose wife was living at the same time in the same city; and, on his being murdered by her brother the tyrant, was by her brother married to a nobleman of Braganzo: lastly, when he also had fallen by the same hand, she, after her brother's death, was again wedded in Verona."—*Translation of Dante*, ut sup. p. 147. See what Foscolo says of her in the *Discorso sul Testo*, p. 329.

Folco, the gallant Troubadour, here placed between Cunizza and Rahab, is no other than Folques, bishop of Toulouse, the persecutor of the Albigenses. It is of him the brutal anecdote is related, that, being asked, during an indiscriminate attack on that people, how the orthodox and heterodox were to be distinguished, he said, "Kill all: God will know his own."

For Rahab, see Joshua, chap. ii. and vi.; and Hebrews xi. 31.

the lawless fires of his youth, as great (he said) as those of Dido or Hercules; but added, that he had no recollection of them, except a joyous one, not for the fault (which does not come to mind in heaven), but for the good which heaven brings out of it. Folco concluded with explaining how Rahab had come into the third Heaven, and with denouncing the indifference of popes and cardinals (those adulterers of the Church) to everything but accursed money-getting.[1]

In an instant, before he could think about it, Dante was in the fourth Heaven, the sun, the abode of Blessed Doctors of the Church. A band of them came encircling him and his guide, as a halo encircles the moon, singing a song, the beauty of which, like jewels too rich to be exported, was not conveyable by expression to mortal fancy. The spirits composing the band were those of St. Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Gratian the Benedictine, Pietro Lombardo, Solomon, Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, Paulus Orosius, Boetius, Isidore, the Venerable Bede, Richard of St. Victor, and Sigebert of Gemblours. St. Thomas was the namer of them to Dante. Their song had paused that he might speak; but when he had done speaking, they began resuming it, one by one, and circling as they moved, like the wheels of church-clocks that sound one after another with a sweet tinkling, when they summon the hearts of the devout to morning prayer.[2]

[1] The reader need not be required to attend to the extraordinary theological disclosures in the whole of the preceding passage, nor yet to consider how much more they disclose than theology or the poet might have desired.

[2] These fifteen personages are chiefly theologians and

Again they stopped, and again St. Thomas addressed the poet. He was of the order of St. Dominic; but with generous grace he held up the founder of the Franciscans, with his vow of poverty, as the example of what a pope should be, and reproved the errors of no order but his own. On the other hand, a new circle of doctors of the Church making their appearance, and enclosing the first as rainbow encloses rainbow, rolling round with it in the unison of a two-fold joy, a voice from the new circle attracted the poet's ear, as the pole attracts the needle, and Saint Buonaventura, a Franciscan, opened upon the praises of St. Dominic, the loving minion of Christianity, the holy wrestler,—benign to his friends and cruel to his enemies;[1]—and so confined his reproofs to his

schoolmen, whose names and obsolete writings are, for the most part, no longer worth mention. The same may be said of the band that comes after them.

Dante should not have set them dancing. It is impossible (every respectfulness of endeavour notwithstanding) to maintain the gravity of one's imagination at the thought of a set of doctors of the Church, Venerable Bede included, wheeling about in giddy rapture like so many dancing dervises, and keeping time to their ecstatic anilities with voices tinkling like church-clocks. You may invest them with as much light or other blessed indistinctness as you please; the beards and the old ages will break through. In vain theologians may tell us that our imaginations are not exalted enough. The answer (if such a charge must be gravely met) is, that Dante's whole Heaven itself is not exalted enough, however wonderful and beautiful in parts. The schools, and the forms of Catholic worship, held even his imagination down. There is more heaven in one placid idea of love than in all these dances and tinklings.

1 "Benigno a' suoi, ed a' nimici crudo."

Cruel indeed;—the founder of the Inquisition! The "loving minion" is Mr. Cary's excellent translation of "*amoroso*

own Franciscan order. He then, as St. Thomas had done with the doctors in the inner circle, named those who constituted the outer: to wit, Illuminato, and Agostino, and Hugues of St. Victor, and Petrus Comestor, and Pope John the Twenty-First, Nathan the Prophet, Chrysostom, Anselmo of Canterbury, Donatus who deigned to teach grammar, Raban of Mentz, and Joachim of Calabria. The two circles then varied their movement by wheeling round one another in counter directions; and after they had chanted, not of Bacchus or Apollo, but of Three Persons in One, St. Thomas, who knew Dante's thoughts by intuition, again addressed him, discoursing of mysteries human and divine, exhorting him to be slow in giving assent or denial to propositions without examination, and bidding him warn people in general how they presumed to anticipate the divine judgment as to who should be saved and who not.[1] The spirit of Solomon then related how souls could resume their bodies glorified; and the two circles uttering a rapturous amen,

drudo." But what a minion, and how loving! With fire and sword and devilry, and no wish (of course) to thrust his own will and pleasure, and bad arguments, down other people's throats! St. Dominic was a Spaniard. So was Borgia. So was Philip the Second. There seems to have been an inherent semi-barbarism in the character of Spain, which it has never got rid of to this day. If it were not for Cervantes, and some modern patriots, it would hardly appear to belong to the right European community. Even Lope de Vega was an inquisitor; and Mendoza, the entertaining author of *Lazarillo de Tormes*, a cruel statesman. Cervantes, however, is enough to sweeten a whole peninsula.

[1] What a pity the reporter of this advice had not humility enough to apply it to himself!

glowed with such intolerable brightness, that the eyes of Beatrice only were able to sustain it. Dante gazed on her with a delight ineffable, and suddenly found himself in the fifth Heaven.

It was the planet Mars, the receptacle of those who had Died Fighting for the Cross. In the middle of its ruddy light stood a cross itself, of enormous dimensions, made of light still greater, and exhibiting, first, in the body of it, the Crucified Presence, glittering all over with indescribable flashes like lightning; and secondly, in addition to and across the Presence, innumerable sparkles of the intensest mixture of white and red, darting to and fro through the whole extent of the crucifix. The movement was like that of motes in a sunbeam. And as a sweet dinning arises from the multitudinous touching of harps and viols, before the ear distinguishes the notes, there issued in like manner from the whole glittering ferment a harmony indistinct but exquisite, which entranced the poet beyond all he had ever felt. He heard even the words, "Arise and conquer," as one who hears and yet hears not.

On a sudden, with a glide like a falling star, there ran down from the right horn of the Cross to the foot of it, one of the lights of this cluster of splendours, distinguishing itself, as it went, like flame in alabaster.

"O flesh of my flesh!" it exclaimed to Dante; "O superabounding Divine Grace! when was the door of Paradise ever twice opened, as it shall have been to thee?"[1]

[1] "O sanguis meus, o superinfusa
Gratia Dei, sicut tibi, cui
Bis unquam cœli janua reclusa?"

The spirit says this in Latin, as if to veil the compliment to

Dante, in astonishment, turned to Beatrice, and saw such a rapture of delight in her eyes, that he seemed, at that instant, as if his own had touched the depth of his acceptance and of his heaven.[1]

The light resumed its speech, but in words too profound in their meaning for Dante to comprehend. They seemed to be returning thanks to God. This rapturous absorption being ended, the speaker expressed in more human terms his gratitude to Beatrice; and then, after inciting Dante to ask his name, declared himself thus:

"O branch of mine, whom I have long desired to behold, I am the root of thy stock; of him thy great-grandsire, who first brought from his mother the family-name into thy house, and whom thou sawest expiating his sin of pride on the first circle of the mountain. Well it befitteth thee to shorten his long suffering with thy good works. Florence,[2] while yet she was confined within the ancient boundary which still contains the bell that summons her to prayer, abided in peace, for she was chaste

the poet in "the obscurity of a learned language." And in truth it is a little strong.

[1] "Che dentro a gli occhi suoi ardeva un riso
Tal, ch' io pensai co' miei toccar lo fondo
De la mia grazia e del mio Paradiso."

That is, says Lombardi, "I thought my eyes could not possibly be more favoured and imparadised" (Pensai che non potessero gli occhi miei essere graziati ed imparadisati maggiormente).—Variorum edition of Dante, Padua, 1822, vol. iii. p. 373.

[2] Here ensues the famous description of those earlier times in Florence, which Dante eulogises at the expense of his own.

and sober. She had no trinkets of chains then, no head-tires, no gaudy sandals, no girdles more worth looking at than the wearers. Fathers were not then afraid of having daughters, for fear they should want dowries too great, and husbands before their time. Families were in no haste to separate; nor had chamberers arisen to shew what enormities they dared to practise. The heights of Rome had not been surpassed by your tower of Uccellatoio, whose fall shall be in proportion to its aspiring. I saw Bellincion Berti walking the streets in a leathern girdle fastened with bone; and his wife come from her looking-glass without a painted face. I saw the Nerlis and the Vecchios contented with the simplest doublets, and their good dames hard at work at their spindles. O happy they! They were sure of burial in their native earth, and none were left desolate by husbands that loved France better than Italy. One kept awake to tend her child in its cradle, lulling it with the household words that had fondled her own infancy. Another, as she sat in the midst of her family, drawing the flax from the distaff, told them stories of Troy, and Fiesole, and Rome. It would have been as great a wonder, then, to see such a woman as Cianghella, or such a man as Lapo Salterello, as it would now be to meet with a Cincinnatus or a Cornelia.[1]

[1] Bellincion Berti was a noble Florentine, of the house of the Ravignani. Cianghella is said to have been an abandoned woman, of manners as shameless as her morals. Lapo Salterelli, one of the co-exiles of Dante, and specially hated by him, was a personage who appears to have exhibited the rare combination of judge and fop. An old commentator, in recording his attention to his hair, seems to intimate that Dante alludes to it in contrasting him with

"It was at that peaceful, at that beautiful time," continued the poet's ancestor, "when we all lived in such good faith and fellowship, and in so sweet a place, that the blessed Virgin vouchsafed the first sight of me to the cries of my mother; and there, in your old Baptistery, I became, at once, Christian and Cacciaguida. My brothers were called Moronto and Eliseo. It was my wife that brought thee, from Valdipado, thy family name of Alighieri. I then followed the Emperor Conrad, and he made me a knight for my good service, and I went with him to fight against the wicked Saracen law, whose people usurp the fold that remains lost through the fault of the shepherd. There, by that foul crew, was I delivered from the snares and pollutions of the world; and so, from the martyrdom, came to this peace."

Cacciaguida was silent. But his descendant praying to be told more of his family and of the old state of Florence, the beatified soldier resumed. He would not, however, speak of his own predecessors. He said it would be more becoming to say nothing as to who they were, or the place they came from. All he disclosed was, that his father and mother lived near the gate San Piero.[1] With

Cincinnatus. If so, Lapo might have reminded the poet of what Cicero says of his beloved Cæsar;—that he once saw him scratching the top of his head with the tip of his finger, that he might not discompose the locks.

[1] "Chi ei si furo, e onde venner quivi,
Più è tacer che ragionare onesto."

Some think Dante was ashamed to speak of these ancestors, from the lowness of their origin; others that he did not choose to make them a boast, for the height of it. I suspect, with Lombardi, from his general character, and from the

regard to Florence, he continued, the number of the inhabitants fit to carry arms was at that time not a fifth of its present amount; but then the blood of the whole city was pure. It had not been mixed up with that of Campi, and Certaldo, and Figghine. It ran clear in the veins of the humblest mechanic.

"Oh, how much better would it have been," cried the soul of the old Florentine, "had my countrymen still kept it as it was, and not brought upon themselves the stench of the peasant knave out of Aguglione, and that other from Signa, with his eye to a bribe! Had Rome done its duty to the emperor, and so prevented the factions that have ruined us, Simifonte would have kept its beggarly upstart to itself; the Conti would have stuck to their parish of Acone, and perhaps the Buondelmonti to Valdigrieve. Crude mixtures do as much harm to the body politic as to the natural body; and size is not strength. The blind bull falls with a speedier plunge than the blind lamb. One sword often slashes round about it better than five. Cities themselves perish. See what has be-

willingness he has avowed to make such boasts (see the opening of canto xvi., *Paradiso*, in the original), that while he claimed for them a descent from the Romans (see *Inferno*, canto xv. 73, &c.), he knew them to be poor in fortune, perhaps of humble condition. What follows, in the text of our abstract, about the purity of the old Florentine blood, even in the veins of the humblest mechanic, may seem to intimate some corroboration of this; and is a curious specimen of republican pride and scorn. This horror of one's neighbours is neither good Christianity, nor surely any very good omen of that Italian union, of which "Young Italy" wishes to think Dante such a harbinger.

All this too, observe, is said in the presence of a vision of Christ on the Cross!

come of Luni and of Urbisaglia; and what will soon become of Sinigaglia too, and of Chiusi! And if cities perish, what is to be expected of families? In my time the Ughi, the Catellini, the Filippi, were great names. So were the Alberichi, the Ormanni, and twenty others. The golden sword of knighthood was then to be seen in the house of Galigaio. The Column, Verrey, was then a great thing in the herald's eye. The Galli, the Sacchetti, were great; so was the old trunk of the Calfucci; so was that of the peculators who now blush to hear of a measure of wheat; and the Sizii and the Arrigucci were drawn in pomp to their civic chairs. Oh, how mighty I saw them then, and how low has their pride brought them! *Florence* in those days deserved her name. She *flourished* indeed; and the balls of gold were ever at the top of the flower.[1] And now the descendants of these men sit in priestly stalls and grow fat. The overweening Adimari, who are such dragons when their foes run, and such lambs when they turn, were then of note so little, that Albertino Donato was angry with Bellincion, his father-in-law, for making him brother to one of their females. On the other hand, thy foes, the Amidei, the origin of all thy tears through the just anger which has slain the happiness of thy life, were honoured in those days; and the honour was partaken by their friends. O Buondelmonte! why didst thou break thy troth to thy first love, and become wedded to another? Many who are now miserable would have been

[1] The *Column*, *Verrey* (vair, variegated, checkered with argent and azure), and the *Balls or* (Palle d' oro), were arms of old families. I do not trouble the reader with notes upon mere family-names, of which nothing else is recorded.

happy, had God given thee to the river Ema, when it rose against thy first coming to Florence. But the Arno had swept our Palladium from its bridge, and Florence was to be the victim on its altar."[1]

Cacciaguida was again silent; but his descendant begged him to speak yet a little more. He had heard, as he came through the nether regions, alarming intimations of the ill fortune that awaited him, and he was anxious to know, from so high and certain an authority, what it would really be.

Cacciaguida said, "As Hippolytus was forced to depart from Athens by the wiles of his cruel stepdame, so must even thou depart out of Florence. Such is the wish, such this very moment the plot, and soon will it be the deed, of those, the business of whose lives is to make a traffic of Christ with Rome. Thou shalt quit everything that is dearest to thee in the world. That is the first arrow shot from the bow of exile. Thou shalt experience how salt is the taste of bread eaten at the expense of others; how hard is the going up and down others' stairs. But what shall most bow thee down, is the worthless and disgusting company with whom thy lot must be partaken; for they shall all turn against thee, the whole mad, heartless, and ungrateful set.

[1] An allusion, apparently acquiescent, to the superstitious popular opinion that the peace of Florence was bound up with the statue of Mars on the old bridge, at the base of which Buondelmonte was slain.

With this Buondelmonte the dissensions in Florence were supposed to have first begun. Machiavelli's account of him is, that he was about to marry a young lady of the Amidei family, when a widow of one of the Donati, who had designed her own daughter for him, contrived that he should see her; the consequence of which was, that he broke his engagement, and was assassinated.—*Historie Fiorentine*, lib. ii.

Nevertheless, it shall not be long first, before themselves, and not thou, shall have cause to hang down their heads for shame. The brutishness of all they do, will shew how well it became thee to be of no party, but the party of thyself.[1]

"Thy first refuge thou shalt owe to the courtesy of the great Lombard, who bears the Ladder charged with the Holy Bird.[2] So benignly shall he regard thee, that in the matter of asking and receiving, the customary order of things shall be reversed between you two, and the gift anticipate the request. With him thou shalt behold the mortal, born under so strong an influence of this our star, that the nations shall take note of him. They are not aware of him yet, by reason of his tender age; but ere the Gascon

[1] "Tu lascerai ogni cosa diletta
Più caramente; e questo è quello strale
Che l' arco de l' elisio pria saetta.

Tu proverai sì come sa di sale
Lo pane altrui, e com' è duro calle
Lo scendere e 'l salir per l' altrui scale.

E quel che più ti graverà le spalle,
Sarà la compagnia malvagia e scempia
Con la qual tu cadrai in questa valle:

Che tutta ingrata, tutta matta ed empia
Si farà contra te: ma poco appresso
Ella, non tu, n' avrà rossa la tempia.

Di sua bestialitate il suo processo
Farà la pruova, sì ch' a te fia bello
Averti fatta parte per te stesso."

[2] The Roman eagle. These are the arms of the Scaligers of Verona.

practise on the great Henry, sparkles of his worth shall break forth in his contempt of money and of ease; and when his munificence appears in all its lustre, his very enemies shall not be able to hold their tongues for admiration.[1] Look thou to this second benefactor also; for many a change of the lots of people shall he make, both rich and poor; and do thou bear in mind, but repeat not, what further I shall now tell thee of thy life." Here the spirit, says the poet, foretold things which afterwards appeared incredible to their very beholders; —and then added: "Such, my son, is the heart and mystery of the things thou hast desired to learn. The snares will shortly gather about thee; but wish not to change places with the contrivers; for thy days will outlast those of their retribution."

Again was the spirit silent; and yet again once more did his descendant question him, anxious to have the advice of one that saw so far, and that spoke the truth so purely, and loved him so well.

"Too plainly, my father," said Dante, "do I see the time coming, when a blow is to be struck me, heaviest ever to the man that is not true to himself. For which reason it is fit that I so far arm myself beforehand, that in losing the spot dearest to me on earth, I do not let my verses deprive me of every other refuge. Now I have been down below through the region whose grief is without end; and I have scaled the mountain from the top of which I was lifted by my lady's eyes; and I have come thus far through heaven, from luminary to luminary; and in the course of this my pilgrimage I have heard things which, if I tell again, may

[1] A prophecy of the renown of Can Grande della Scala, who had received Dante at his court.

bitterly disrelish with many. Yet, on the other hand, if I prove but a timid friend to truth, I fear I shall not survive with the generations by whom the present times will be called times of old."

The light that enclosed the treasure which its descendant had found in heaven, first flashed at this speech like a golden mirror against the sun, and then it replied thus:

"Let the consciences blush at thy words that have reason to blush. Do thou, far from shadow of misrepresentation, make manifest all which thou hast seen, and let the sore places be galled that deserve it. Thy bitter truths shall carry with them vital nourishment—thy voice, as the wind does, shall smite loudest the loftiest summits; and no little shall that redound to thy praise. It is for this reason that, in all thy journey, thou hast been shewn none but spirits of note, since little heed would have been taken of such as excite doubt by their obscurity."

The spirit of Cacciaguida now relapsed into the silent joy of its reflections, and the poet was standing absorbed in the mingled feelings of his own, when Beatrice said to him, "Change the current of thy thoughts. Consider how near I am in heaven to one that repayeth every wrong."

Dante turned at the sound of this comfort, and felt no longer any other wish than to look upon her eyes; but she said, with a smile, "Turn thee round again, and attend. I am not thy only Paradise." And Dante again turned, and saw his ancestor prepared to say more.

Cacciaguida bade him look again on the Cross, and he should see various spirits, as he named them, flash over it like lightning; and they did so.

That of Joshua, which was first mentioned, darted along the Cross in a stream. The light of Judas Maccabeus went spinning, as if joy had scourged it.[1] Charlemagne and Orlando swept away together, pursued by the poet's eyes. Guglielmo[2] followed, and Rinaldo, and Godfrey of Bouillon, and Robert Guiscard of Naples; and the light of Cacciaguida himself darted back to its place, and, uttering another sort of voice, began shewing how sweet a singer he too was amidst the glittering choir.

Dante turned to share the joy with Beatrice, and, by the lovely paling of her cheek, like a maiden's when it delivers itself of the burden of a blush,[3] knew that he was in another and whiter star. It was the planet Jupiter, the abode of blessed Administrators of Justice.

Here he beheld troops of dazzling essences,

1 "Letizia era ferza del paléo."

2 Supposed to be one of the early Williams, Princes of Orange; but it is doubted whether the First, in the time of Charlemagne, or the Second, who followed Godfrey of Bouillon. Mr. Cary thinks the former; and the mention of his kinsman Rinaldo (Ariosto's Paladin?) seems to confirm his opinion; yet the situation of the name in the text brings it nearer to Godfrey; and Rinoardo (the name of Rinaldo in Dante) might possibly mean "Raimbaud," the kinsman and associate of the second William. Robert Guiscard is the Norman who conquered Naples.

3 Exquisitely beautiful feeling!

"Quale è il trasmutare in picciol varco
Di tempo in bianca donna, quando 'l volto
Suo si discarchi di vergogna il carco."

What follows, respecting letters of the alphabet and the Roman eagle, is in a very different taste, though mixed with many beauties.

warbling as they flew, and shaping their flights hither and thither, like birds when they rise from the banks of rivers, and rejoice with one another in new-found pasture. But the figures into which the flights were shaped were of a more special sort, being mystical compositions of letters of the alphabet, now a D, now an I, now an L, and so on, till the poet observed that they completed the whole text of Scripture, which says, *Diligite justitiam, qui judicatis terram*—(Love righteousness, ye that be judges of the earth). The last letter, M, they did not decompose like the rest, but kept it entire for a while and glowed so deeply within it, that the silvery orb thereabout seemed burning with gold. Other lights, with a song of rapture, then descended like a crown of lilies, on the top of the letter; and then, from the body of it, rose thousands of sparks, as from a shaken firebrand, and, gradually expanding into the form of an eagle, the lights which had descended like lilies distributed themselves over the whole bird, encrusting it with rubies flashing in the sun.

But what, says the poet, was never yet heard of, written, or imagined,—the beak of the eagle spoke! It uttered many minds in one voice, just as one heat is given out by many embers; and proclaimed itself to have been thus exalted, because it united justice and mercy while on earth.

Dante addressed this splendid phenomenon, and prayed it to ease his mind of the perplexities of its worldly reason respecting the Divine nature and government, and the exclusion from heaven of goodness itself, unless within the Christian pale.

The celestial bird, rousing itself into motion with delight, like a falcon in the conscious energy

of its will and beauty, when, upon being set free from its hood, it glances above it into the air, and claps its self-congratulating wings, answered nevertheless somewhat disdainfully, that it was impossible for man, in his mortal state, to comprehend such things; and that the astonishment he feels at them, though doubtless it would be excusable under other circumstances, must rest satisfied with the affirmations of Scripture.

The bird then bent over its questioner, as a stork does over the nestling newly fed when it looks up at her, and then wheeling round, and renewing its warble, concluded it with saying, "As my notes are to thee that understandest them not, so are the judgments of the Eternal to thine earthly brethren. None ever yet ascended into these heavenly regions that did not believe in Christ, either after he was crucified or before it. Yet many, who call Christ! Christ! shall at the last day be found less near to him than such as knew him not. What shall the kings of Islam say to your Christian kings, when they see the book of judgment opened, and hear all that is set down in it to their dishonour? In that book shall be read the desolation which Albert will inflict on Bohemia:[1]

[1] The emperor Albert the First, when he obtained Bohemia for his son Rodolph. Of the sovereigns that follow, he who adulterated his people's money, and died by the "hog's teeth" (a wild boar in hunting), is the French king, Philip the Fourth; the quarrelling fools of England and Scotland are Edward the First and Baliol; the luxurious Spaniard is Ferdinand the Fourth, said to have killed himself in his youth by intemperance; the effeminate Bohemian, Winceslaus the Second; the "lame wretch of Jerusalem," Charles the Second of Naples, titular king of Jerusalem; the cowardly warder of the Isle of Fire (Sicily), Frederick of the house of

—in that book, the woes inflicted on Paris by that adulterator of his kingdom's money, who shall die by the hog's teeth:—in that book, the ambition which makes such mad fools of the Scotch and English kings, that they cannot keep within their bounds:—in that book, the luxury of the Spaniard, and the effeminate life of the Bohemian, who neither knows nor cares for anything worthy:—in that book, the lame wretch of Jerusalem, whose value will be expressed by a unit, and his worthlessness by a million:—in that book, the avarice and cowardice of the warder of the Isle of Fire, in which old Anchises died; and that the record may answer the better to his abundant littleness, the writing shall be in short-hand; and his uncle's and his brother's filthy doings shall be read in that book—they who have made such rottenness of a good old house and two diadems; and there also shall the Portuguese and the Norwegian be known for what they are, and the coiner of Dalmatia, who beheld with such covetous eyes the Venetian ducat. O blessed Hungary, if thou wouldst resolve to endure no longer!—O blessed Navarre, if thou wouldst but keep out the Frenchman with thy mountain walls! May the cries and groans of Nicosia and Famagosta be an earnest of those happier days, proclaiming as they do the vile

Arragon; his filthy brother and uncle, James of Arragon and James of Minorca; the Portuguese (according to the probable guess of Cary), the rebellious son of King Dionysius; the Norwegian, Haco; and the Dalmatian, Wladislaus, but why thus accused, not known. As to Hungary, its crown was then disputed by rival princes; Navarre was thinking of shaking off the yoke of France; and Nicosia and Famagosta, in Cyprus, were complaining of their feeble sovereign, Henry the Second.

habits of the beast, who keeps so close in the path of the herd his brethren."

The blessed bird for a moment was silent; but as, at the going down of the sun, the heavens are darkened, and then break forth into innumerable stars which the sun lights up,[1] so the splendours within the figure of the bird suddenly became more splendid, and broke forth into songs too beautiful for mortal to remember.

O dulcet love, that dost shew thee forth in smiles, how ardent was thy manifestation in the lustrous sparkles which arose out of the mere thoughts of those pious hearts!

After the gems in that glittering figure had ceased chiming their angelic songs, the poet seemed to hear the murmur of a river which comes falling from rock to rock, and shews, by the fulness of its tone, the abundance of its mountain spring; and as the sound of the guitar is modulated on the neck of it, and the breath of the pipe is accordant to the spiracle from which it issues, so the murmuring within the eagle suddenly took voice, and, rising through the neck, again issued forth in words. The bird now bade the poet fix his attention on its eye; because, of all the fires that composed its figure, those that sparkled in the eye were the noblest. The spirit (it said) which Dante beheld in the pupil was that of the royal singer who danced before the ark, now enjoying the reward of his superiority to vulgar discernment. Of the five spirits that composed the eyebrow, the one nearest the beak was Trajan, now experienced above all others in the knowledge of what it costs not to follow Christ, by reason of his having been

[1] The opinion in the time of Dante.

in hell before he was translated to heaven. Next to Trajan was Hezekiah, whose penitence delayed for him the hour of his death: next Hezekiah, Constantine, though, in letting the pope become a prince instead of a pastor, he had unwittingly brought destruction on the world: next Constantine, William the Good of Sicily, whose death is not more lamented than the lives of those who contest his crown: and lastly, next William, Riphæus the Trojan. "What erring mortal," cried the bird, "would believe it possible to find Riphæus the Trojan among the blest?—but so it is; and he now knows more respecting the divine grace than mortals do, though even he discerns it not to the depth."[1]

The bird again relapsing into silence, appeared to repose on the happiness of its thoughts, like the lark which, after quivering and expatiating through all its airy warble, becomes mute and content, having satisfied its soul to the last drop of its sweetness.[2]

[1] All this part about the eagle, who, it seems, is beheld only in profile, and who bids the poet "mind his eye," in the pupil of which is King David, while the eyebrow consists of orthodox sovereigns, including Riphæus the Trojan, is irresistibly ludicrous. No consideration can or ought to hinder us from laughing at it. It was mere party-will in Dante to lug it in; and his perverseness injured his fancy, as it deserved.

In the next passage the real poet resumes himself, and with what relief to one's feelings!

[2] Most beautiful is this simile of the lark:

"Qual lodoletta che 'n aere si spazia
Prima cantando, e poi tace contenta
De l' ultima dolcezza che la sazia."

In the *Pentameron and Pentalogia*, Petrarch is made to say, "All the verses that ever were written on the nightingale

But again Dante could not help speaking, being astonished to find Pagans in Heaven; and once more the celestial figure indulged his curiosity. It told him that Trajan had been delivered from hell, for his love of justice, by the prayers of St. Gregory; and that Riphæus, for the same reason, had been gifted with a prophetic knowledge of the Redemption; and then it ended with a rapture on the hidden mysteries of Predestination, and on the joy of ignorance itself when submitting to the divine will. The two blessed spirits, meanwhile, whom the bird mentioned, like the fingers of sweet lutenist to sweet singer, when they quiver to his warble as it goes, manifested the delight they experienced by movements of accord simultaneous as the twinkling of two eyes.[1]

are scarcely worth the beautiful triad of this divine poet on the lark [and then he repeats them]. In the first of them, do you not see the trembling of her wings against the sky? As often as I repeat them, my ear is satisfied, my heart (like hers) contented.

"*Boccaccio.*—I agree with you in the perfect and unrivalled beauty of the first; but in the third there is a redundance. Is not *contenta* quite enough without *che la sazia?* The picture is before us, the sentiment within us; and, behold, we kick when we are full of manna.

"*Petrarch.*—I acknowledge the correctness and propriety of your remark; and yet beauties in poetry must be examined as carefully as blemishes, and even more."—p. 92.

Perhaps Dante would have argued that *sazia* expresses the satiety itself, so that the very superfluousness becomes a propriety.

[1] "E come a buon cantor buon citarista
Fa seguitar lo guizzo de la corda
In che più di piacer lo canto acquista;
Sì, mentre che parlò, mi si ricorda,
Ch' io vidi le duo luci benedette,
Pur come batter d' occhi si concorda,
Con le parole muover le fiammette."

Dante turned to receive his own final delight from the eyes of Beatrice, and he found it, though the customary smile on her face was no longer there. She told him that her beauty increased with such intensity at every fresh ascent among the stars, that he would no longer have been able to bear the smile; and they were now in the seventh Heaven, or the planet Saturn, the retreat of those who had passed their lives in Holy Contemplation.

In this crystal sphere, called after the name of the monarch who reigned over the Age of Innocence, Dante looked up, and beheld a ladder, the hue of which was like gold when the sun glisters it, and the height so great that its top was out of sight; and down the steps of this ladder he saw coming such multitudes of shining spirits, that it seemed as if all the lights of heaven must have been there poured forth; but not a sound was in the whole splendour. It was spared to the poet for the same reason that he missed the smile of Beatrice. When they came to a certain step in the ladder, some of the spirits flew off it in circles or other careers, like rooks when they issue from their trees in the morning to dry their feathers in the sun, part of them going away without returning to the point they left, and others contenting themselves with flying round about it. One of them came so near Dante and Beatrice, and brightened with such ardour, that the poet saw it was done in affection towards them, and begged the loving spirit to tell them who it was.

"Between the two coasts of Italy," said the spirit, "and not far from thine own country, the stony mountains ascend into a ridge so lofty that the thunder rolls beneath it. Catria is its name.

Beneath it is a consecrated cell; and in that cell I was called Pietro Damiano.[1] I so devoted myself to the service of God, that with no other sustenance than the juice of the olive, I forgot both heat and cold, happy in heavenly meditation. That cloister made abundant returns in its season to these granaries of the Lord; but so idle has it become now, that it is fit the world should know its barrenness. The days of my mortal life were drawing to a close, when I was besought and drawn into wearing the hat which descends every day from bad head to worse.[2] St. Peter and St. Paul came lean and barefoot, getting their bread where they could; but pastors nowadays must be lifted from the ground, and have ushers going before them, and train-bearers behind them, and ride upon palfreys covered with their spreading mantles, so that two beasts go under one skin.[3] O Lord, how long!"

At these words Dante saw more splendours come pouring down the ladder, and wheel round and round, and become at every wheel more beautiful. The whole dazzling body then gathered round the indignant speaker, and shouted something in a voice so tremendous, that the poet could liken it to nothing on earth. The thunder

[1] A corrector of clerical abuses, who, though a cardinal, and much employed in public affairs, preferred the simplicity of a private life. He has left writings, the eloquence of which, according to Tiraboschi, is "worthy of a better age." Petrarch also makes honourable mention of him. See Cary, ut sup. p. 169. Dante lived a good while in the monastery of Catria, and is said to have finished his poem there.—*Lombardi in loc.* vol. iii. p. 547.

[2] The cardinal's hat.

[3] "Sì che due bestie van sott' una pelle."

was so overwhelming, that he did not even hear what they said.[1]

Pallid and stunned, he turned in affright to Beatrice, who comforted him as a mother comforts a child that wants breath to speak. The shout was prophetic of the vengeance about to overtake the Church. Beatrice then directed his attention to a multitude of small orbs, which increased one another's beauty by interchanging their splendours. They enclosed the spirits of those who most combined meditation with love. One of them was Saint Benedict; and others Macarius and Romoaldo.[2] The light of St. Benedict issued forth from among its companions to address the poet; and after explaining how its occupant was unable further to disclose himself, inveighed against the degeneracy of the religious orders. It then rejoined its fellows, and the whole company clustering into one meteor, swept aloft like a whirlwind. Beatrice beckoned the poet to ascend after them. He did so, gifted with the usual virtue by her eyes; and found himself in the twin

[1] "Dintorno a questa (voce) vennero e fermarsi,
E fero un grido di sì alto suono,
Che non potrebbe qui assomigliarsi:

Nè io lo 'ntesi, sì mi vinse il tuono."

Around this voice they flocked, a mighty crowd,
And raised a shout so huge, that earthly wonder
Knoweth no likeness for a peal so loud;

Nor could I hear the words, it spoke such thunder.

If a Longinus had written after Dante, he would have put this passage into his treatise on the Sublime.

[2] Benedict, the founder of the order called after his name. Macarius, an Egyptian monk and moralist. Romoaldo, founder of the Camaldoli.

light of the Gemini, the constellation that presided over his birth. He was now in the region of the fixed stars.

"Thou art now," said his guide, "so near the summit of thy prayers, that it behoves thee to take a last look at things below thee, and see how little they should account in thine eyes." Dante turned his eyes downwards through all the seven spheres, and saw the earth so diminutive, that he smiled at its miserable appearance. Wisest, thought he, is the man that esteems it least; and truly worthy he that sets his thoughts on the world to come. He now saw the moon without those spots in it which made him formerly attribute the variation to dense and rare. He sustained the brightness of the face of the sun, and discerned all the signs and motions and relative distances of the planets. Finally, he saw, as he rolled round with the sphere in which he stood, and by virtue of his gifted sight, the petty arena, from hill to harbour, which filled his countrymen with such ferocious ambition; and then he turned his eyes to the sweet eyes beside him.[1]

[1] The reader of English poetry will be reminded of a passage in Cowley:

"Lo, I mount; and lo,
How small the biggest parts of earth's proud title shew!
Where shall I find the noble British land?
Lo, I at last a northern speck espy,
Which in the sea does lie,
And seems a grain o' the sand.
For this will any sin, or bleed?
Of civil wars is this the meed?
And is it this, alas, which we,
Oh, irony of words! do call Great Brittanie?"

And he afterwards, on reaching higher depths of silence, says

Beatrice stood wrapt in attention, looking earnestly towards the south, as if she expected some appearance. She resembled the bird that sits among the dewy leaves in the darkness of night, yearning for the coming of the morning, that she may again behold her young, and have light by which to seek the food, that renders her fatigue for them a joy. So stood Beatrice, looking; which caused Dante to watch in the same direction, with the feelings of one that is already possessed of some new delight by the assuredness of his expectation.[1]

very finely and with a beautiful intimation of the all-inclusiveness of the Deity by the use of a singular instead of a plural verb,—

"Where am I now? angels and God is here."

All which follows in Dante, up to the appearance of Saint Peter, is full of grandeur and loveliness.

1 "Come l' augello intra l' amate fronte,
Posato al nido de' suoi dolci nati
La notte che le cose ci nasconde,

Che per veder gli aspetti desiati,
E per trovar lo cibo onde gli pasca,
In che i gravi labor gli sono aggrati,

Previene 'l tempo in su l' aperta frasca,
E con ardente affetto il sole aspetta,
Fiso guardando pur che l' alba nasca;

Così la donna mia si stava eretta
E attenta, involta in ver la plaga
Sotto la quale il sol mostra men fretta

Sì che veggendola io sospesa e vaga,
Fecimi quale è quei che disiando
Altro vorria, e sperando s' appaga."

The quarter on which they were gazing soon became brighter and brighter, and Beatrice exclaimed, "Behold the armies of the triumph of Christ!" Her face appeared all fire, and her eyes so full of love, that the poet could find no words to express them.

As the moon, when the depths of heaven are serene with her fulness, looks abroad smiling among her eternal handmaids the stars, that paint every gulf of the great hollow with beauty;[1] so brightest, above myriads of splendours around it, appeared a sun which gave radiance to them all, even as our earthly sun gives light to the constellations.

"O Beatrice!" exclaimed Dante, overpowered, "sweet and beloved guide!"

"Overwhelming," said Beatrice, "is the virtue with which nothing can compare. What thou hast seen is the Wisdom and the Power, by whom the path between heaven and earth has been laid open."[2]

Dante's soul—like the fire which falls to earth out of the swollen thunder-cloud, instead of rising according to the wont of fire—had grown too great for his still mortal nature; and he could afterwards find within him no memory of what it did.

"Open thine eyes," said Beatrice, "and see me now indeed. Thou hast beheld things that empower thee to sustain my smiling."

Dante, while doing as he was desired, felt like

[1] "Quale ne' plenilunii sereni
Trivia ride tra le Ninfe eterne,
Che dipingono 'l ciel per tutti i seni."

[2] He has seen Christ in his own unreflected person.

one who has suddenly waked up from a dream, and endeavours in vain to recollect it.

"Never," said he, "can that moment be erased from the book of the past. If all the tongues were granted me that were fed with the richest milk of Polyhymnia and her sisters, they could not express one thousandth part of the beauty of that divine smile, or of the thorough perfection which it made of the whole of her divine countenance."

But Beatrice said, "Why dost thou so enamour thee of this face, and lose the sight of the beautiful guide, blossoming beneath the beams of Christ? Behold the rose, in which the Word was made flesh.[1] Behold the lilies, by whose odour the way of life is tracked."

Dante looked, and gave battle to the sight with his weak eyes.[2]

As flowers on a cloudy day in a meadow are suddenly lit up by a gleam of sunshine, he beheld multitudes of splendours effulgent with beaming rays that smote on them from above, though he could not discern the source of the effulgence. He had invoked the name of the Virgin when he looked; and the gracious fountain of the light had drawn itself higher up within the heaven, to accommodate the radiance to his faculties. He then beheld the Virgin herself bodily present,—her who is fairest now in heaven, as she was on earth; and while his eyes were being painted with her beauty,[3]

[1] The Virgin Mary.

[2] "Mi rendei
A la battaglia de' debili cigli."

[3] "Ambo le luci mi dipinse."

there fell on a sudden a seraphic light from heaven, which, spinning into a circle as it came, formed a diadem round her head, still spinning, and warbling as it spun. The sweetest melody that ever drew the soul to it on earth would have seemed like the splitting of a thunder-cloud, compared with the music that sung around the head of that jewel of Paradise.[1]

"I am Angelic Love," said the light, "and I spin for joy of the womb in which our Hope abided; and ever, O Lady of Heaven, must I thus attend thee, as long as thou art pleased to attend thy Son, journeying in his loving-kindness from sphere to sphere."

All the other splendours now resounded the name of Mary. The Virgin began ascending to pursue the path of her Son; and Dante, unable to endure her beauty as it rose, turned his eyes to the angelical callers on the name of Mary, who remained yearning after her with their hands outstretched, as a babe yearns after the bosom withdrawn from his lips. Then rising after her themselves, they halted ere they went out of sight, and sung "O Queen of Heaven" so sweetly, that the delight never quitted the air.

A flame now approached and thrice encircled Beatrice, singing all the while so divinely, that the poet could retain no idea expressive of its sweetness. Mortal imagination cannot unfold such

1 "Qualunque melodia più dolce suona
Qua giù, e più a se l' anima tira,
2 Parebbe nube che squarciata tuona,

Comparata al sonar di quella lira
Onde si coronava il bel zaffiro
Del quale il ciel più chiaro s' inzaffira."

wonder. It was Saint Peter, whom she had besought to come down from his higher sphere, in order to catechise and discourse with her companion on the subject of faith.

The catechising and the discourse ensued, and were concluded by the Apostle's giving the poet the benediction, and encircling his forehead thrice with his holy light. "So well," said Dante, "was he pleased with my answers." [1]

"If ever," continued the Florentine, "the sacred poem to which heaven and earth have set their hands, and which for years past has wasted my flesh in the writing, shall prevail against the cruelty that shut me out of the sweet fold in which I slept like a lamb, wishing harm to none but the wolves that beset it,—with another voice, and in another guise than now, will I return, a poet, and standing by the fount of my baptism, assume the crown that belongs to me; for I there first entered on

1 "Benedicendomi cantando
Tre volte cinse me, sì com' io tacqui,
L' Apostolico lume, al cui comando
Io avea detto; sì nel dir gli piacqui."

It was this passage, and the one that follows it, which led Foscolo to suspect that Dante wished to lay claim to a divine mission; an opinion which has excited great indignation among the orthodox. See his *Discorso sul Testo*, ut sup. pp. 64, 77–90 and 335–338; and the preface of the Milanese Editors to the *Convito* of Dante.—*Opere Minori*, 12mo, vol. ii. p. xvii. Foscolo's conjecture seems hardly borne out by the context; but I think Dante had boldness and self-estimation enough to have advanced any claim whatsoever, had events turned out as he expected. What man but himself (supposing him the believer he professed to be) would have thought of thus making himself free of the courts of Heaven, and constituting St. Peter his applauding catechist!

the faith which gives souls to God; and for that faith did Peter thus encircle my forehead."[1]

A flame enclosing Saint James now succeeded to that of Saint Peter, and after greeting his predecessor as doves greet one another, murmuring and moving round, proceeded to examine the mortal visitant on the subject of Hope. The examination was closed amidst resounding anthems of, "Let their hope be in thee;"[2] and a third apostolic flame ensued, enclosing Saint John, who completed the catechism with the topic of Charity. Dante acquitted himself with skill throughout; the spheres resounded with songs of "Holy, holy," Beatrice joining in the warble; and the poet suddenly found Adam beside him. The parent of the human race knew by intuition what his descendant wished to learn of him; and mani-

[1] The verses quoted in the preceding note conclude the twenty-fourth canto of Paradise; and those, of which the passage just given is a translation, commence the twenty-fifth:

"Se mai continga, che 'l poema sacro
Al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra
Sì che m' ha fatto per più anni macro,

Vinca la crudeltà che fuor mi serra
Del bello ovile ov' io dormi' agnello
Nimico a' lupi che gli danno guerra;

Con altra voce omai, con altro vello
Ritornerò poeta, ed in sul fonte
Del mio battesmo prenderò 'l capello:

Perocchè ne la fede che fa conte
L' anime a Dio, quiv' entra' io, e poi
Pietro per lei sì mi girò la fronte."

[2] "Sperent in te." Psalm ix. 10. The English version says, "And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee."

festing his assent before he spoke, as an animal sometimes does by movements and quiverings of the flesh within its coat, corresponding with its goodwill,[1] told him, that his fall was not owing to the fruit which he tasted, but to the violation of the injunction not to taste it; that he remained in the Limbo on hell-borders upwards of five thousand years; and that the language he spoke had become obsolete before the days of Nimrod.

The gentle fire of Saint Peter now began to assume an awful brightness, such as the planet Jupiter might assume, if Mars and it were birds, and exchanged the colour of their plumage.[2] Silence fell upon the celestial choristers; and the Apostle spoke thus:

"Wonder not if thou seest me change colour. Thou wilt see, while I speak, all which is round about us colour in like manner. He who usurps my place on earth,—*my* place, I say,—ay, *mine*,—

1 "Tal volta un animal coverto broglia
Sì che l' affetto convien che si paia
Per lo seguir che face a lui la 'nvoglia."

A natural, but strange, and surely not sufficiently dignified image for the occasion. It is difficult to be quite content with a former one, in which the greetings of St. Peter and St. James are compared to those of doves murmuring and sidling round about one another; though Christian sentiment may warrant it, if we do not too strongly present the Apostles to one's imagination.

2 "Tal ne la sembianza sua divenne,
Qual diverebbe Giove, s' egli e Marte
Fossero augelli e cambiassersi penne."

Nobody who opened the *Commedia* for the first time at this fantastical image would suppose the author was a great poet, or expect the tremendous passage that ensues!

which before God is now vacant,—has converted the city in which my dust lies buried into a common-sewer of filth and blood; so that the fiend who fell from hence rejoices himself down there."

At these words of the Apostle the whole face of Heaven was covered with a blush, red as dawn or sunset; and Beatrice changed colour, like a maiden that shrinks in alarm from the report of blame in another. The eclipse was like that which took place when the Supreme died upon the Cross.

Saint Peter resumed with a voice not less awfully changed than his appearance:

"Not for the purpose of being sold for money was the spouse of Christ fed and nourished with my blood, and with the blood of Linus,—the blood of Cletus. Sextus did not bleed for it, nor Pius, nor Callixtus, nor Urban; men, for whose deaths all Christendom wept. They died that souls might be innocent and go to Heaven. Never was it intention of ours, that the sitters in the holy chair should divide one half of Christendom against the other; should turn my keys into ensigns of war against the faithful; and stamp my very image upon mercenary and lying documents, which make me, here in Heaven, blush and turn cold to think of. Arm of God, why sleepest thou? Men out of Gascony and Cahors are even now making ready to drink our blood. O lofty beginning, to what vile conclusion must thou come! But the high Providence, which made Scipio the sustainer of the Roman sovereignty of the world, will fail not its timely succour. And thou, my son, that for weight of thy mortal clothing must again descend to earth, see thou that thou openest thy

mouth, and hidest not from others what has not been hidden from thyself."

As white and thick as the snows go streaming athwart the air when the sun is in Capricorn, so the angelical spirits that had been gathered in the air of Saturn streamed away after the Apostle, as he turned with the other saints to depart; and the eyes of Dante followed them till they became viewless.[1]

The divine eyes of Beatrice recalled him to herself; and at the same instant the two companions found themselves in the ninth Heaven or *Primum Mobile*, the last of the material Heavens, and the mover of those beneath it.

Here he had a glimpse of the divine essence, in likeness of a point of inconceivably sharp brightness enringed with the angelic hierarchies. All earth, and heaven, and nature, hung from it. Beatrice explained many mysteries to him connected with that sight; and then vehemently de-

[1] In spite of the unheavenly nature of invective, of something of a lurking conceit in the making an eclipse out of a blush, and in the positive bathos, and I fear almost indecent irrelevancy of the introduction of Beatrice at all on such an occasion, much more under the feeble aspect of one young lady blushing for another,—this scene altogether is a very grand one; and the violence itself of the holy invective awful.

A curious subject for reflection is here presented. What sort of pope would Dante himself have made? Would he have taken to the loving or the hating side of his genius? To the St. John or the St. Peter of his own poem? St. Francis or St. Dominic?—I am afraid, all things considered, we should have had in him rather a Gregory the Seventh or Julius the Second, than a Benedict the Eleventh or a Ganganelli. What fine Church-hymns he would have written!

nounced the false and foolish teachers that quit the authority of the Bible for speculations of their own, and degrade the preaching of the gospel with ribald jests, and legends of Saint Anthony and his pig.[1]

Returning, however, to more celestial thoughts, her face became so full of beauty, that Dante declares he must cease to endeavour to speak of it, and that he doubts whether the sight can ever be thoroughly enjoyed by any save its Maker.[2] Her look carried him upward as before, and he was now in the Empyrean, or region of Pure Light;—of light made of intellect full of love; love of truth, full of joy; joy, transcendent above all sweetness.

Streams of living radiance came rushing and flashing round about him, swathing him with light, as the lightning sometimes enwraps and dashes against the blinded eyes; but the light was love here, and instead of injuring, gave new power to the object it embraced.

With this new infusion of strength into his organs of vision, Dante looked, and saw a vast flood of it, effulgent with flashing splendours, and pouring down like a river between banks painted with the loveliest flowers. Fiery living sparkles arose from it on all sides, and pitched themselves into the cups of the flowers, where they remained awhile, like rubies set in gold; till inebriated with

[1] She does not see (so blind is even holy vehemence!) that for the same reason the denouncement itself is out of its place. The preachers brought St. Anthony and his pig into their pulpits; she brings them into Heaven!

[2] "Certo io credo
Che solo il suo fattor tutta la goda."

the odours, they recast themselves into the bosom of the flood; and ever as one returned, another leaped forth. Beatrice bade him dip his eyes into the light, that he might obtain power to see deeper into its nature; for the river, and the jewels that sprang out of it to and fro, and the laughing flowers on the banks, were themselves but shadows of the truth which they included; not, indeed, in their essential selves, but inasmuch as without further assistance the beholder's eyes could not see them as they were. Dante rushed to the stream as eagerly as the lips of an infant to the breast, when it has slept beyond its time; and his eyelashes had no sooner touched it, than the length of the river became a breadth and a circle, and its real nature lay unveiled before him, like a face when a mask is taken off. It was the whole two combined courts of Heaven, the angelical and the human, in circumference larger than would hold the sun, and all blazing beneath a light, which was reflected downwards in its turn upon the sphere of the Primum Mobile below it, the mover of the universe. And as a green cliff by the water's side seems to delight in seeing itself reflected from head to foot with all its verdure and its flowers; so, round about on all sides, upon thousands of thrones, the blessed spirits that once lived on earth sat beholding themselves in the light. And yet even all these together formed but the lowest part of the spectacle, which ascended above them, tier upon tier, in the manner of an immeasurable rose,—all dilating itself, doubling still and doubling, and all odorous with the praises of an ever-vernal sun. Into the base of it, as into the yellow of the flower, with a dumb glance that yet promised to

speak, Beatrice drew forward her companion, and said, "Behold the innumerable assemblage of the white garments! Behold our city, how large its circuit! Behold our seats, which are, nevertheless, so full, that few comers are wanted to fill them! On that lofty one at which thou art looking, surmounted with the crown, and which shall be occupied before thou joinest this bridal feast, shall be seated the soul of the great Henry, who would fain set Italy right before she is prepared for it.[1] The blind waywardness of which ye are sick renders ye like the bantling, who, while he is dying of hunger, kicks away his nurse. And Rome is governed by one that cannot walk in the same path with such a man, whatever be the road.[2] But God will not long endure him. He will be thrust down into the pit with Simon Magus; and his feet, when he arrives there, will thrust down the man of Alagna still lower."[3]

In the form, then, of a white rose the blessed multitude of human souls lay manifest before the eyes of the poet; and now he observed, that the winged portion of the blest, the angels, who fly up with their wings nearer to Him that fills them with love, came to and fro upon the rose like bees; now descending into its bosom, now streaming

[1] The Emperor Henry of Luxembourg, Dante's idol; at the close of whose brief and inefficient appearance in Italy, his hopes of restoration to his country were at an end.

[2] Pope Clement the Fifth. Dante's enemy, Boniface, was now dead, and of course in Tartarus, in the red-hot tomb which the poet had prepared for him.

[3] Boniface himself. Pope Clement's red-hot feet are to thrust down Pope Boniface into a gulf still hotter. So says the gentle Beatrice in Heaven, and in the face of all that is angelical!

back to the source of their affection. Their faces were all fire, their wings golden, their garments whiter than snow. Whenever they descended on the flower, they went from fold to fold, fanning their loins, and communicating the peace and ardour which they gathered as they gave. Dante beheld all,—every flight and action of the whole winged multitude,—without let or shadow; for he stood in the region of light itself, and light has no obstacle where it is deservedly vouchsafed.

"Oh," cries the poet, "if the barbarians that came from the north stood dumb with amazement to behold the magnificence of Rome, thinking they saw unearthly greatness in the Lateran, what must I have thought, who had thus come from human to divine, from time to eternity, from the people of Florence to beings just and sane?"

Dante stood, without a wish either to speak or to hear. He felt like a pilgrim who has arrived within the place of his devotion, and who looks round about him, hoping some day to relate what he sees. He gazed upwards and downwards, and on every side round about, and saw movements graceful with every truth of innocence, and faces full of loving persuasion, rich in their own smiles and in the light of the smiles of others.

He turned to Beatrice, but she was gone;—gone, as a messenger from herself told him, to resume her seat in the blessed rose, which the messenger accordingly pointed out. She sat in the third circle from the top, as far from Dante as the bottom of the sea is from the region of thunder; and yet he saw her as plainly as if she had been close at hand. He addressed words to her of thanks for all she had done for him, and a hope

for her assistance after death; and she looked down at him and smiled.

The messenger was St. Bernard. He bade the poet lift his eyes higher; and Dante beheld the Virgin Mary sitting above the rose, in the centre of an intense redness of light, like another dawn. Thousands of angels were hanging buoyant around her, each having its own distinct splendour and adornment, and all were singing, and expressing heavenly mirth; and she smiled on them with such loveliness, that joy was in the eyes of all the blessed.

At Mary's feet was sitting Eve, beautiful—she that opened the wound which Mary closed; and at the feet of Eve was Rachel, with Beatrice; and at the feet of Rachel was Sarah, and then Judith, then Rebecca, then Ruth, ancestress of him out of whose penitence came the song of the Miserere;[1] and so other Hebrew women, down all the gradations of the flower, dividing, by the line which they made, the Christians who lived before Christ from those who lived after; a line which, on the opposite side of the rose, was answered by a similar one of Founders of the Church, at the top of whom was John the Baptist. The rose also was divided horizontally by a step which projected beyond the others, and underneath which, known by the childishness of their looks and voices, were the souls of such as were too young to have attained Heaven by assistance of good works.

St. Bernard then directed his companion to look again at the Virgin, and gather from her countenance the power of beholding the face of Christ as God. Her aspect was flooded with gladness from

[1] David.

the spirits around her; while the angel who had descended to her on earth now hailed her above with "Ave, Maria!" singing till the whole host of Heaven joined in the song. St. Bernard then prayed to her to help his companion's eyesight. Beatrice, with others of the blest, was seen joining in the prayer, their hands stretched upwards; and the Virgin, after benignly looking on the petitioners, gazed upwards herself, shewing the way with her own eyes to the still greater vision. Dante then looked also, and beheld what he had no words to speak, or memory to endure.

He awoke as from a dream, retaining only a sense of sweetness that ever trickled to his heart.

Earnestly praying afterwards, however, that grace might be so far vouchsafed to a portion of his recollection, as to enable him to convey to his fellow-creatures one smallest glimpse of the glory of what he saw, his ardour was so emboldened by help of the very mystery at whose sight he must have perished had he faltered, that his eyes, unblasted, attained to a perception of the Sum of Infinitude. He beheld, concentrated in one spot —written in one volume of Love—all which is diffused, and can become the subject of thought and study throughout the universe—all substance and accident and mode—all so compounded that they become one light. He thought he beheld at one and the same time the oneness of this knot, and the universality of all which it implies; because, when it came to his recollection, his heart dilated, and in the course of one moment he felt ages of impatience to speak of it.

But thoughts as well as words failed him; and

though ever afterwards he could no more cease to yearn towards it, than he could take defect for completion, or separate the idea of happiness from the wish to attain it, still the utmost he could say of what he remembered would fall as short of right speech as the sounds of an infant's tongue while it is murmuring over the nipple; for the more he had looked at that light, the more he found in it to amaze him, so that his brain toiled with the succession of the astonishments. He saw, in the deep but clear self-subsistence, three circles of three different colours of the same breadth, one of them reflecting one of the others as rainbow does rainbow, and the third consisting of a fire equally breathing from both.[1]

O eternal Light! thou that dwellest in thyself alone, thou alone understandest thyself, and art by thyself understood, and, so understanding, thou laughest at thyself, and lovest.

The second, or reflected circle, as it went round, seemed to be painted by its own colours with the likeness of a human face.[2]

But how this was done, or how the beholder was to express it, threw his mind into the same state of bewilderment as the mathematician experiences when he vainly pores over the circle to discover the principle by which he is to square it.

He did, however, in a manner discern it. A flash of light was vouchsafed him for the purpose; but the light left him no power to impart the discernment; nor did he feel any longer impatient for the gift. Desire became absorbed in sub-

[1] The Trinity. [2] The Incarnation.

mission, moving in as smooth unison as the particles of a wheel, with the Love that is the mover of the sun and the stars.[1]

[1] In the Variorum edition of Dante, ut sup. vol. iii. p. 845, we are informed that a gentleman of Naples, the Cavaliere Giuseppe de Cesare, was the first to notice (not long since, I presume) the curious circumstance of Dante's having terminated the three portions of his poem with the word "stars." He thinks that it was done as a happy augury of life and renown to the subject. The literal intention, however, seems to have been to shew us, how all his aspirations terminated.

THE END

Printed by Ballantyne, Hanson & Co.
Edinburgh & London