STORIES FROM DANTE

BY

NORLEY CHESTER

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Dante

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Stories from Dante

By NORLEY CHESTER *pseudon. for*

AUTHOR OF "DANTE VIGNETTES," "OLGA'S DREAM," ETC.

Emily Underdown

—— by the love impell'd,
That moves the sun in heaven and all the stars.
Paradise, Canto xxxiii.

LONDON
FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.
AND NEW YORK
1898

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PREFACE

No attempt has been made in the following pages to give an exhaustive account of Dante's great work. The aim has been rather to detach from his life and work, or from the lives of those associated with him, such incidents and scenes as can be presented in a form suitable and attractive to young people. It is hoped also that while bringing out those spiritual truths underlying Dante's great poem, which may readily be understood by children, an interest may at the same time be created, which will later lead to a closer acquaintance with it.

NORLEY CHESTER.

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STORIES FROM DANTE

CHAPTER I

BEATRICE

"Mine eyes had now
Ta'en view of her, by whom all other thoughts
Were barred admittance."

Purgatory, canto xxxii.

IN a quiet narrow street, not far from the Piazza or public square of Florence, stands a low-roofed house, now grey with age, before which you will pause with reverence if you ever pass that way, for there in 1266 was born Dante, Italy's greatest poet.

Dante's father belonged to the burgher, or middle, class, and the little Dante—or, to give him the full name for which Dante was short,

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Durante Alighieri—was probably brought up in much the same way as any other boy of that same period and country. Probably he attended daily at the Abbey school, a kind of grammar school not far from his home; and later, when he was growing up, continued his studies at one of the Universities, that of Bologna in all probability. He also had lessons at one time from a Florentine, who was very noted as an author and scholar in his own day, and whose name was Brunetto Latini. For him Dante had a great affection, as he himself shows us in his principal poem; and later I shall have to tell you what he says of his old tutor there. Brunetto had a great deal of influence on his pupil, and from him Dante learnt lessons of more value than those generally taught at school, and was filled with some of the aspirations which made him the great man he afterwards became. It is interesting to know what were the principal subjects which the little Dante would study at school, and in many

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respects his education would differ very little from that of a boy of to-day. He would learn Latin and arithmetic and geometry just as boys do now, and he would also learn music and astronomy, and dialectics, or the science of reasoning, and rhetoric, or the art of public speaking. He was probably an eager little student who made rapid progress, and was in great favour with his teachers. From the works which he wrote as a man we can form a good idea of how keenly he would enter into his studies. Latin would be a delight to him, because it led him to the enjoyment of the great classics in that language, and especially of the works of Virgil, for which he had an intense admiration, and which influenced his own work very greatly later. In those days, too, there were very few books written in Italian—which indeed was little more than a collection of dialects until Dante himself gave it a lasting literary value by using it for his own writings —so that nearly all his possibility of reading

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would arise from a knowledge of the old Latin language. Astronomy must also have been specially congenial to the future poet, who mastered all that was known at his day as to the courses of the stars and the place of the world in the universe. Music, too, was another source of delight to him, and he often alludes to the sweet sounds of various instruments, or to the art of singing, in the manner of one to whom music was a real solace and a great joy.

In addition to these studies, we have reason to think that Dante studied and loved the art of drawing, though this would not be in the ordinary course of his school instruction. Not only in his writings does he often describe works of art, and the manner in which they are produced—which he might have learnt from some of his artist friends—but he also actually tells us about a drawing that he himself made. It was one day when he was in great trouble, owing to the death of a lady named Beatrice, about whom you

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will hear more directly, and Dante describes how he was seeking to forget his grief in the occupation of drawing angels on some tablets, and how he was so absorbed in what he was doing, that some of his friends came into the room and stood by his side several minutes before he became conscious of their presence. How much we should like to have a glimpse of that angel drawn by Dante! He describes angels so beautifully, and introduces such wonderful angelic beings in his poetry, that we feel sure his drawings of them must have been very beautiful also.

But to return to Dante's childhood. We know very few particulars of that time, and can only imagine the kind of boy he must have been from what we know of his manhood; but though few details of his early years have come down to us, he himself has left a record of one event, which, happening when he was quite a little boy, had a wonderful influence on the whole of his later life.

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It was the custom in Dante's day for the people of Florence to hold festive gatherings at the beginning of May. By then the cold winds, which in the earlier months sweep down from the Apennines, would have gone, the trees would be in full leaf, and the beautiful flowers, for which the surroundings of Florence are still noted, would be out in all their freshness. To these feasts children were sometimes taken by their parents, and to such an one at the house of a near neighbour named Folco Portinari, Dante was taken by his father on the May-day of the year when he was nine years old. There were other boys and girls present at this gathering, and amongst them was Folco's own daughter, a fair, beautiful child of eight, whose name was Beatrice, and whose meeting with Dante was to exercise so great an influence on the poet's after life. He does not give us many particulars of this his first meeting with her. Probably they gazed at each other shyly from behind their elders, as children are apt

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to do in all ages, or Dante, even then of a quiet studious habit, may have watched Beatrice unobserved as she sported with her companions among the May flowers. He tells us that he never heard her speak until many years after, when he was a growing-up youth and she a tall, graceful maiden; but later he refers to this childish meeting as one of the great events of his life, and speaks of the little Florentine maiden as "the youngest of God's angels." He tells us too what she wore, and we can picture her as she first appeared to him in her frock of a rich yet subdued crimson, with a girdle, such as was worn then, round her waist, and ornaments suitable to her childish years.

From this time forth Dante worshipped Beatrice with a great and mighty passion. She became the ruling influence of his life; and it was for her sake that he strove to be good and noble, and to do great things. He did not often see her to speak to; and she married some one else while still quite young,

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and died soon afterwards. But he used to watch her as she passed down the narrow streets of Florence with other ladies of her age and station, and she was to him the representative of all that is best and noblest. It was through her that he became a poet; and his early poems, which he afterwards collected in a little volume called the *Vita Nuova*, or New Life, were addressed to her. I must give you one little story of a curious dream which comes in this book, and then I must tell you of the great sorrow of Dante's life.

The dream came to Dante when he was ill, and it seemed to him in it that a darkness passed over the sun and blotted its light, so that the stars were visible though it was daytime, and the air seemed to be filled with a great sadness. And while he was wondering what it all meant, a friend came to him and told him that Beatrice was dead. Then Dante wept bitterly, for he could hardly bear to think of losing his dear lady, but after

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a time he raised his eyes and saw a beautiful and consoling sight. For overhead were a number of lovely angels flying towards heaven, and bearing before them a little cloud of exceeding whiteness which Dante knew at once to be the soul of Beatrice, and as they soared the angels sang a song of triumph and joy. Then it seemed to Dante that he went into the room where the body of Beatrice lay, and that he saw her women covering her head with a white veil; but her face wore such an expression of sweet humility that she seemed to him to be saying, "Now do I behold the beginning of all peace." But a great sorrow came over Dante at the sight of her lying there dead, and he longed to die himself, so that he too might go to heaven, instead of waiting below on the earth from which Beatrice's spirit had fled. He thought that he left her death-chamber and returned to his own home, and there sobbed with bitter anguish as he longed for the sight of his lady's soul. And so deeply

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was he affected by his dream, that his sobs and tears became real, and some ladies who were watching him and taking care of him, thought that it was his illness which caused his suffering, and wept for very pity themselves. And they woke him gently, and tried to soothe him as a nurse soothes a patient who has been troubled with feverish dreams, and Dante told them all that he had dreamt. Afterwards, when he had recovered from his illness, Dante wrote a poem about this dream; and some day I hope you will read it for yourselves. I also hope that you will see a beautiful picture, painted by a modern artist named Rossetti, which represents the poet gazing with sad and loving eyes at the dead Beatrice, over whom her ladies are about to place the veil. Overhead are seen the angels bearing her soul to heaven, and through the open door of the room we catch a glimpse of a quaint street in Florence. Some doves are flying across the sky, and on the body of Beatrice some scarlet poppies are placed.

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Dante's dream was soon realized in part, for but a little time after Beatrice died in all the freshness of her youth and beauty. This was the great sorrow of Dante's life; but like many others, when borne in a right spirit, it brought blessing in its train. At first he was so crushed with grief, so utterly desolate, that life seemed to have lost all interest for him; but after a time he began to think of Beatrice as among the angels, and still able to see him and help him though no longer on earth. And he had a wonderful vision, which made him resolve to write no more of her until he should relate what he saw in it, and then to say of her such things as had never before been said of any woman. Some years afterwards he fulfilled this vow, and it was thus that his great poem, *The Divine Comedy*, came to be written. But in the meantime other most important events had happened to him, and about these I must tell you something before I come to stories from *The Divine Comedy* itself.

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CHAPTER II

DANTE'S EXILE

"Thou shalt leave each thing
Beloved most dearly; this is the first shaft
Shot from the bow of exile. Thou shalt prove
How salt the savour is of other's bread,
How hard the passage to descend and climb
By other's stairs."

Paradise, canto xvii.

DANTE was not only a great poet, though it is as one that we generally think of him now. When a young man, he fought at least one battle in defence of his native city, and took an active part in the public life there. This was no easy thing at that time, for Florence was in a state of great disturbance, and dreadful quarrels, and even fights, in which people were killed, constantly took place amongst the citizens. Dante tried to

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bring about a more peaceful condition of affairs, for he loved his native city very dearly, and it pained him that there should be so much ill-feeling and discord there. But he did not succeed, and things went on from bad to worse. There was one Florentine named Corso Donati, who especially stirred up discontent, and who was of a fiery, excitable temper himself, and he entered into a conspiracy with the Pope to invite Charles of Valois, a brother of the King of France, into Florence; and the result of this was very grievous for Dante and many others. For when the French prince had entered the town, Corso Donati and his followers combined with him and his forces, to burn and pillage the homes of those who did not belong to the same party as themselves. Amongst these was Dante, whose home was pillaged, and he himself sent into exile by the victorious party. All this happened about the year 1301, and from that day until the one of his death, twenty-four years later, Dante was a wanderer,

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with no fixed home and no recognized position; and in leaving Florence he left all that he held most dear on earth.

Some time after the death of Beatrice, he had married a lady of whom very little is known for certain, except her name, which is a very pretty one—Gemma Donati. Her brothers were Corso Donati, who, as I have just told you, did so much to stir up strife in Florence, and Forese Donati, who was a poet, and one of Dante's favourite companions; and she also had a sister named Piccarda, whose sad story I shall have to tell you much later; but of Gemma herself very little is known. Some people think that she was a lady about whom Dante wrote at the end of the *Vita Nuova*, and to whom he was first attracted by the kind glances of sympathy she directed towards him when he was overwhelmed with sorrow; and this is very likely to have been the case, though we do not know it for certain. Others would have us believe that Gemma had a bad temper, and that the poet's

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life with her was very unhappy, but there is no proof at all of this, and without we should be very slow to believe such things. It is quite true that when Dante was exiled from Florence he left his wife behind him there, but this was only the natural thing to happen. Gemma, being closely related to the victorious party, would be quite safe at home, and it was impossible for the whole family, which consisted of seven young children, to join such a wandering and uncertain life as Dante's was at first. So as a matter of course, when the husband and father was exiled, Gemma would stay at home, to take care of the children and look after the household property, until such time as they could all live together again. For a long time Dante clung to the hope that this would soon be, and that he would be allowed to return to his native city ; but the day never came, and the only offer of recall which was ever made to him was on terms that his proud spirit rejected with scorn. So, as far as we know, the day when he left Florence was the

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one on which he saw his wife also for the last time. Some of his children, we are glad to think, he did see again; two of his sons, named Jacobo and Piero (or James and Peter), joined him for a time when they were older and able to go out into the world, and one of his daughters, whom he had named Beatrice, after his ideal, came to him in his last illness, and nursed him, and after his death became a nun in the town where he had died.

This must have been a great consolation to Dante, for we have every reason to believe that he was fond of his family. He says very little, in fact hardly anything, about his home in his writings, but he does himself speak about his exile as depriving him of all he most cared for, and he often refers to children in a way which makes us feel sure that he must have been a very kind and affectionate father in his own home. All this makes us realize still more clearly how great a sorrow exile from Florence must have been to him.

Perhaps, too, if he had loved Florence less

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and tried less faithfully to serve her, he would have felt it all less bitterly than he did; but no suffering is so intense as that inflicted on us by one we love, and to Dante it was always an additional pang in his sorrow that it was his own dear Florence who had driven him forth and treated him so ungratefully. Greater too than the hardships and poverty that he had to undergo in his wandering life was the bitterness of being dependent upon others. He had always been a very proud man, and in Florence he had held a high position and had never stooped to ask a favour from any one; but now he had no money, and was obliged to accept help from other people. He wandered from city to city for years, sometimes, perhaps, earning a little by teaching at universities, and sometimes by some political work, but wherever he went he bore the sense of humiliation and dependence with him. He seems to have met with a good deal of kindness, and was the guest at different times of several princes and nobles, and of some of

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these he speaks in terms of affectionate gratitude; but when at their courts his proud spirit was continually galled by his position. Near the close of his life, in speaking of Can Grande della Scala, a young prince of Verona, between whom and Dante quite a warm friendship existed, and at whose court he resided for some time, the poet suddenly breaks forth into a bitter cry: "How salt the savour of another's bread, how hard the climbing by another's stairs!"—showing that even the kindness of his friend could not make him bear the sense of dependence with resignation. He cherished the hope too for many years, that Florence would relent and would receive him back with honour. There is still standing there, a quaint octagonal building which existed before Christian times, and was originally a heathen temple; later it became the Parish Church of Florence, and was dedicated to S. John, and every child born within the city of Florence was taken there to be christened. This custom existed

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long before Dante's day, and now, though it is many centuries since the magnificent cathedral was built near by, it is still used as a Baptistry, and every little Florentine baby is brought there to be baptized. Dante himself was, of course, baptized there, and he had a passionate affection for the church, which he speaks of as "My beautiful S. John's," and for many years after his exile, his great hope was that he should not only be recalled to Florence, but that the poet's crown of laurel, the greatest earthly honour for which he could hope, would be placed on his forehead in this dear church. In his great poem he refers to this hope, which is so pathetic to us because we know that it was never realized.

"If ever it should happen," he says, "that the sacred poem, to which I have devoted my hand, Heaven and Earth, and the writing of which has made me lean for years, should vanquish the cruelty which shuts me out from the dear sheepfold where I rested as a lamb, I should return with a different voice, and at

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the font of my baptism receive on my brow the poetic crown."

Another time great hopes arose in the poet's heart because a new Emperor came to the throne, and though Italy was, in a sense, a number of independent States, they all swore allegiance to the Emperor, and therefore the election of a new one was very important to them. The Emperor, who was named Henry VII, entered Italy, which his predecessor had not done, and Dante, who was absent, probably at Paris, at the time, hastened back in consequence. He thought that Henry would enter Florence, and that there would be a change in the Government, and he would be recalled, and he also hoped that this would cause a better state of things there, for the disorder and corruption which existed in Florence were a perpetual torture to his honour-loving soul. He wrote letters of burning indignation to the rulers there, and of eager entreaty to the Emperor, and for a short time the prospect

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really seemed brighter. But the Emperor went to Pisa and delayed there, and before he could enter Florence he took a fever and died. Alas, poor Dante! Once more his hopes were crushed, and the future looked darker than before. It seemed as if his life was to be nothing but sorrow and disappointment, and that everything for which he most cared was to be denied him—everything to which he put his hand to fail. No wonder that in the portraits showing him in his later life, his face wears a terribly sad expression, as if it had lost the art of smiling. He died at last in 1325, at the court of Count Guido di Polenta, the Prince of Ravenna, and we have reason to think that he found a quiet and comparatively happy resting-place there for his last years. The Count loved him very much, and erected a costly monument to his honour, and Florence, which had refused admission to her greatest man when living, has since his death exerted every effort to recover his dead body. It has been in vain,

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however. In the Church of Santa Croce, in Florence, you may see an elaborate monument to the poet, but his body still rests far away from the city he loved so passionately, and which treated him so ill.

But before we leave the subject of Dante's life, there is one thing more to be said. Those years of wandering and sorrow and apparent defeat are the years to which we owe all the greatest work of Dante's life, and while he was going from city to city, in weariness and exile, he was creating one of the greatest poems the world has ever seen. So, through all his troubles, he had some consolation. If his body was dependent and bound, his spirit was free, and could soar to the highest heavens; if he trod the steep stairs of another's home, and ate with bitterness the bread of an exile, in imagination his soul could rejoice in a banquet of the most exalted philosophy and his spiritual eyes behold "the land which is very far off;" and though around him was the uncongenial society of those

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who could not understand his genius or sympathize with his thoughts, he could, at any time, command intercourse with saints and angels.

So you see we need not altogether pity Dante. If he had great sorrows, he had surely great compensations, and if he had heavy losses, he had the greatest gift bestowed on man—the gift of Heaven-sent genius.

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CHAPTER III

THE DARK WOOD

"In the midway of this our mortal life
I found me in a gloomy wood astray
Gone from the path direct . . . . . .
How savage wild
That forest, how robust and rough its growth!"
Inferno, canto i.

THE Divine Comedy is the story of one of the most wonderful visions ever imagined by man, and though we must remember that Dante lived in an age less enlightened than our own, and believed many things that we may hesitate to accept, yet this grand poem of his has deep underlying truths which appeal to every age, and which are as useful for us to learn as they were for those who lived in the time when it was written.

The first thing that Dante tells us about

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in his great poem, is how he had lost his way in a wood, so terribly dark and so full of tangled branches that even the thought of it filled him with awe. He emerged from it at last after much difficulty, and saw before him a steep mountain, on which the light of the rising sun already fell. It must indeed have been a relief to the weary poet, after his long struggle in the dreary mazes of the wood, to see an open path and the light of day before him ; but his difficulties were not yet overcome, for as he started to pursue his way toward the mountain three terrible obstacles appeared, and barred his path. The first of these was a leopard with shining skin, the second was a lion with head savagely raised as if seeking for prey, and the third a horribly lean she-wolf. Dante was afraid to pass these fierce beasts, and gradually he was forced to retreat to the wood. He must have felt almost in despair at having to do so, because the path he was leaving seemed to be the only one by which

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he could ever hope to return to the daylight; but help was near at hand, though he did not know it. I have already told you how when Beatrice died the poet consoled himself by the thought that she still watched over him from Heaven, and now, while he had been wandering in such distress through the wood, she, from her high place near God's throne, had looked down and seen his misfortunes, and had determined to try and save him. So she left Heaven and came to a region called Limbo, about which I shall have more to tell you later, and there she found Virgil, the great Latin poet, whose work Dante loved and admired more, perhaps, than that of any other. And she told Virgil all about Dante's trouble, and how he was lost in the wood, and she entreated him to go to his succour, even shedding tears as she thought of his distress. So it came about that as Dante turned back to the wood he saw a shadowy form; and a voice, which sounded strange and hoarse as though it had not been used for

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long, addressed him ; and he entreated this form, whether a man or a spirit, to help him. Then the form again spoke, and when it told him that it was Virgil himself to whom he was speaking, we can imagine what Dante's delight must have been, and how eagerly he would accept him as his guide, since he already loved and revered him so greatly through his writings. Virgil then told him that he could not hope to pass the wolf nor to leave the wood by the path which she barred, but he undertook to lead him by another way, which would take him through the realms where those who sinned and had died unrepentant suffered punishment, and then up the Mount of Purgatory, where penitent sinners were purged and cleansed from their sins, and there he would meet Beatrice, who herself would show him the realms where those who were good and holy had a place, and where God lived with His angels. Thus it was that Dante undertook the awful journey through Hell, Purgatory,

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and Heaven, which is the subject of his poem. And all this is an allegory, for the three beasts mean Envy, Pride, and Selfishness, and the wood means error and spiritual darkness, and the only way of escape is by suffering and repentance, which lead the soul of man, blinded by sin, back once more to virtue and the light of God.

And so it came to pass that Dante started, with Virgil as his guide, on the great journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven.

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CHAPTER IV

THE FAIR MEADOW

"We came
Into the mead with lively verdure fresh.

. . . . .

We to one side retired, into a place
Open and bright and lofty, whence each one
Stood manifest to view. Incontinent
There on the green enamel of the plain
Were shown to me the great spirits, by whose sight
I am exalted in my own esteem."

Inferno, canto iv.

IT had been early morning when Dante first emerged from the wood, but by now it was already twilight, and on earth men and women and even animals were ceasing from their labours and beginning to rest for the night. But for Dante there was to be another night of toil and travel, and at the time when others were seeking rest his great

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and difficult journey was to begin. And now, as he followed Virgil, grave doubts began to trouble the mind of the poet, who, like all truly great men, was conscious of his own weakness and shortcomings, and these doubts he confided to Virgil, telling him that he feared he was unworthy of the great honour done him in being allowed to undertake this strange journey. He had read in Virgil's great poem, the *Æneid*, how Æneas, the father of the Roman people, had been allowed to go into the realms of the departed to visit the shade of his father, and S. Paul too he believed to have visited the other world, but how could he, who was neither Æneas nor S. Paul, venture where only such men as these had been admitted before? Virgil, however, soon allayed Dante's fears by telling him how Beatrice herself had interceded on his behalf, and been the means of Virgil coming to guide him, and at this Dante's tired courage revived as buds revive beneath the light of the sun after the cold and frost

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of the night, and without further misgiving he followed Virgil along the dark and woody pathway.

After they had walked for some time, the poets came to a great gateway, which Virgil explained to be the entrance to Hell, or the *Inferno* as it is called in Italian, and passing through this Dante found himself among a very great crowd of spirits, who were hurrying to and fro, crying and groaning and wringing their hands, and quite confusing Dante, who turned again to Virgil for an explanation. Virgil told him that these were people who when on earth had not the strength or courage to be good, and were only kept from being wicked by the same want of energy and decision. He described them as never having really lived at all, so weak and contemptible were their lives, and he told Dante that they were so unworthy of notice that he had better only give them a glance and then pass on. As Dante did so, he noticed that the crowd of spirits was following a banner which whirled

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to and fro in a meaningless way, just as in life they had followed no fixed aim, but had drifted according to the passing influence of the moment. Among them he recognized one whom he describes to us as "he who through cowardice made the great refusal," and who is supposed to be the Pope Celestine V, a humble priest who was raised to the high office of Pope, but had not the courage to face the duties and difficulties of the post, and soon resigned it. The poets came next to a great river called the Acheron, on the banks of which were a number of spirits waiting for a barque which was seen approaching, and which was to take them across the waters. Inside was an old white-haired boatman named Charon, who addressed the spirits in harsh terms, and who was also very angry at first to see that Dante, a living man, was among them, and bade him leave the crowd of dead. But when Virgil explained to him that Dante was visiting these realms by a special decree from Heaven, he made no

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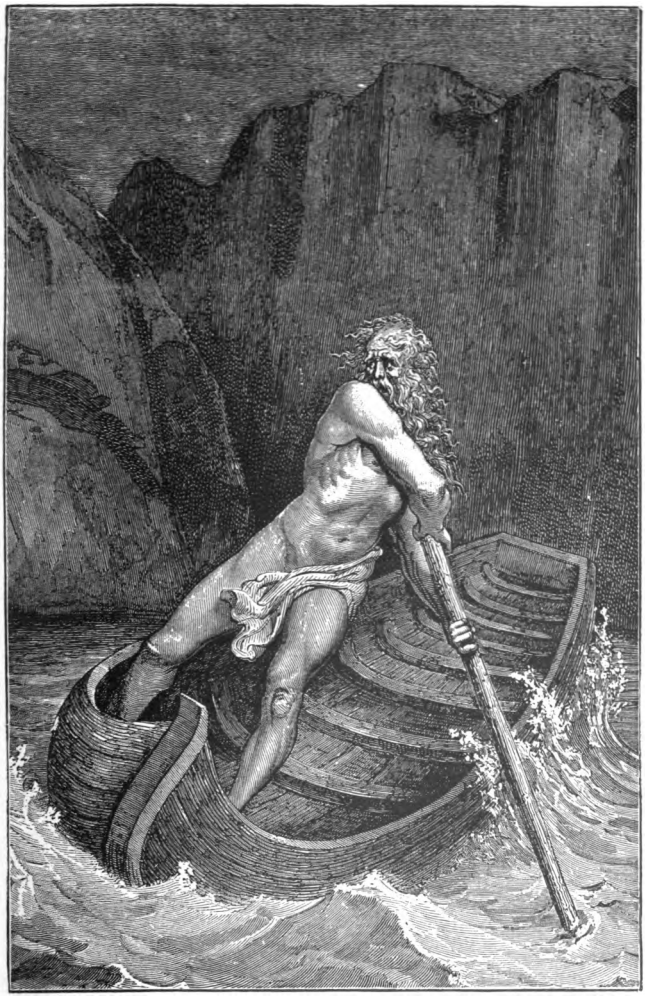

INSIDE WAS AN OLD WHITE-HAIRED BOATMAN NAMED CHARON.

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further objection. Dante then entered the boat and was taken across the river by Charon, but about this journey he can tell us nothing, for at the same moment there was a terrible flash of lightning, the whole region shook and trembled, and Dante was so overcome with fear that he lost consciousness. On recovering, he found himself on the outer edge of the Inferno, in a region called Limbo, where he had the strange and wonderful experience about which you are now to hear.

The Inferno was in the shape of a deep gulf or pit, with circles going round its inner walls, in which the different kinds of sin were punished, but this region of Limbo was quite different from the other parts of it, because here, as Virgil explained to Dante, there was no punishment ; for the inhabitants were not wicked people, but heathens who had led good lives, and were only not admitted into Heaven because they had never learnt to believe in God or Christ, and to this region Virgil

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himself belonged. Dante wanted to know if no one had ever been released from there, and Virgil told him that after the Crucifixion Christ Himself came down, "crowned with signs of victory," and Himself opened the gates for many noble people, patriarchs, and prophets, of whom we read in the Old Testament, and who were the first spirits to enter Heaven, which before then had only been inhabited by God and the Angels. Among those spirits who were released Virgil named Adam and Eve, Abel, Noah, Moses, David, Abraham, and others.

While talking thus, the poets had been moving slowly forward through what Dante describes as "a forest of souls," for so thick was the crowd that to wind their way through it was like pushing through the thick growth of a forest, and now Dante was surprised to see that the gloom before him was dispelled by a bright flame, which seemed to distinguish a part of Limbo set aside for special honour. Virgil told him that this was indeed so, and

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that the part to which they were drawing near was the abode of those who on earth had won great fame by their work; and while Dante went forward eager to learn who these might be, a voice was heard addressing Virgil, "Honour to the great poet who now returns," it said; and Dante saw four great spirits with calm faces, advancing to meet them. Dante must have felt sure from their demeanour that these were people of great distinction, and soon he knew that he was right, for these were four of the greatest poets the world had known. Virgil himself named them to him one by one, and we can imagine what a thrill of delight must have gone through Dante as he heard each familiar name.

The first one, who in virtue of his rank advanced in front of the others with a drawn sword in his hand, and who was the one whose voice had greeted Virgil, was Homer, the great Greek poet, who wrote the wonderful epics called the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, about

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the siege of Troy and the adventures of some of its heroes, and Virgil called him "the sovereign poet," because he was greater than any other. Behind him came the three Latin poets, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan ; and they had come to meet Virgil and welcome him back to their midst. For some little time these poets spoke together apart, and probably Virgil took this opportunity of telling them about Dante, and how he too was a poet who was striving hard towards the ideal which all poets have before them, for turning to him with courteous welcome they now included him in their conversation, so, as he tells us with pardonable pride, he was "sixth amid such high intellect." It must have been a glorious moment for Dante ; he had read and loved the works of the Latin poets, and though we are not sure if he was able to read Homer in the original Greek, he certainly knew enough of his work to recognize his sublime genius, and now he not only saw these great men, but heard

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them talk, and—greatest joy of all — was admitted to intercourse with them on an equality.

The six poets moved on together in the direction of the light, speaking of many things, the exact nature of which we do not know, for Dante tells us that, though suitable for discussion there, it would be hardly right for him to disclose them to the world. We may be quite sure, however, that the conversation of six such men must have been of a noble and exalted kind.

After a time they came to the place where the light had shone, and Dante beheld a great fortress encircled by high walls and a beautiful stream. They passed over the stream as if it had been dry land, and Dante saw before him a meadow, so green and firm and grassy that it seemed like enamel, and on this were seated many of the greatest people in the world's history, whose names had been familiar to him on earth. There were the heroes Hector and brave Æneas who fought

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in the siege of Troy, and Brutus the Roman patriot, and Saladin the Saracen King, to whose courage and fine character Dante pays this tribute, although he fought against Europeans and held Jerusalem against the Christians. And besides these heroes, there were many poets and philosophers who served the world with the pen instead of with the sword, and who Dante saw gathered together now, enjoying intercourse with each other. Great men who had never met on earth were here able to discuss their noble ideas and lofty imaginations, or impart them to those who had loved to study their teaching. Plato was here near to his master Socrates, and Aristotle surrounded by a little crowd of his pupils, and Euripides who wrote the great Greek tragedies, and Euclid whose mathematical methods we use to this day. They had grave eyes, Dante tells us, and when they spoke their voices were sad and sweet. Among these he also noticed some women, whose high characters and noble lives

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are especially worthy of honour. There was Lucretia the wife of Collatinus, who chose death rather than dishonour, and there was also the Roman matron who is better known by the title "Mother of the Gracchi" than by her own name of Cornelia, so devoted was she to her two sons Tiberius and Caius Gracchus, and of whom we are told the story which no doubt you may have heard, how when a rich lady of her acquaintance, who had been showing her all her wealth of ornaments, asked to see those of Cornelia in return, the latter put her arms around the two young sons who had just come in from school, and for whose sake she was ready to deny herself everything, and said proudly, "These are my jewels!"

But delightful as was this region of virtue and high intellect, and much as Dante would have liked to linger there, time was pressing, and as yet his great journey was hardly begun. So after watching the spirits for a short time the little band of six poets divided,

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Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan descending from the mound where they had stood apart, to join the throng below, while Virgil and Dante left this bright and peaceful spot behind, and moved onwards towards a dark and dreary region.

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CHAPTER V

THE BLACK LAKE AND FIERY CITY

"We in company
Of th' inky waters, journeying by their side,
Enter'd, though by a different track, beneath.
. . . . . .
We came within the fosses deep, that moat
This region comfortless. The walls appear'd
As they were framed of iron. We had made
Wide circuit, ere a place we reach'd, where loud
The mariner cried vehement, 'Go forth!
Th' entrance is here!'"

Inferno, cantos vii, viii.

AFTER leaving Limbo, Dante came to a gloomy and horrible path, and here, in order to continue his journey, he had to pass a monster named Minos, whose name he takes from that of a king of Crete of whom we read in Greek mythology. The first sight of this monster filled Dante with fear, and in truth it

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was very alarming as he lay before them grinning and snarling, and lashing the unfortunate sinners who passed before him with his great tail. He uttered words of warning and anger, too, to Dante as soon as he perceived him, but a few words from Virgil quieted him as they had done Charon, and he then allowed the poets to pass in safety, and they found themselves in a region where there was little light, and where a strong wind blew the spirits onwards before them. Here Dante saw many heroes and heroines of whom he had read in history or literature. There was Dido the Queen of Carthage, of whom Virgil wrote in his great poem, where he describes how she burnt herself on a great funeral pyre, for love of Æneas when that hero had sailed away, leaving her behind at Carthage; and there was Helen of Sparta, whose great beauty was the cause of the Trojan War; and Paris and Achilles, who fought and were slain in that war; and Cleopatra, the famed Queen of Egypt, and more than a thousand others. As

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he watched them, Dante was struck with special interest by two spirits who came in his direction, cleaving the air like two doves who hasten to their nest, as they were borne on by the strong wind. These proved to be Francesca and Paolo who had lived in Italy, and whom Dante may even have seen and known there, as he was twenty-four at the time of their death; at any rate, he was so much touched and overcome by the recital of her sorrows and sufferings which Francesca now gave him, that once more, as on the banks of Acheron, he fell senseless to the ground. On recovering consciousness, Francesca and Paolo and all the other spirits in the region of the strong wind were left out of sight, and Dante found himself in a region darkened by a perpetual fall of hail and heavy discoloured rain, under which gluttons suffered punishment for their vile sin, while in addition to the suffering caused by the hail and rain, Cerberus, a huge dog with three heads, ran amongst them, biting and tearing

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them. One of these spirits was a Florentine, who on account of his gluttony was known there as Ciacco, or the Hog, and he had a long conversation with Dante, in the course of which he prophesied many things about his native city.

Leaving the gluttons, the poets had again to pass a monster. This time it was Pluto the god of riches, who was heard to mutter some gibberish in a harsh voice, which made Dante fear to pass him, until Virgil explained that he was powerless to hurt him or stop his progress, and at a few words from him Pluto, overcome with awe, sank to the ground, leaving the path free for the poets.

And now Dante was to see those who misused money suffering punishment for their sin. These were the avaricious, or those who love money for its own sake, and hoard up their ill-gotten gains; and the prodigals, who go to the other extreme, and spend their money in a lavish or wrong manner. They were ranged on two sides, and constantly

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met, hurling great stones against each other by the force of their chests, the avaricious always reproaching the prodigals with the words, "Why cast away?" to which the prodigals retorted, "Why retain?"

Dante did not linger long here, but passing on with Virgil, came next to the scene which gives its name to this chapter, and found himself on the shores of a great lake, if lake it may indeed rightly be called, since it was very different from our ideas of one. Here on earth the word suggests an expanse of clear waters, reflecting the blue sky in its depths, and with the sunlight glistening on its surface; but the waters of this lake were of a dark dull colour, and thick with mud, and no ray of sunlight ever reached where it lay, no glimpse of blue sky could ever have been reflected in its murky marshes. As Dante followed Virgil along a narrow pathway that ran round part of the shore, he saw that the lake was full of movement, and distinguished a number of people immersed in it,

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fighting with each other, and making their surroundings even more horrible by their quarrelling. These Virgil told him were the Angry, people who on earth gave way to all their evil tempers and discontent, and who were punished by being placed in the lake, and he pointed out to Dante certain bubbles on the surface and told him that these were caused by the continual sighs of some of the spirits, who were fixed in the mire below. They wasted their time on earth in discontent and bad temper, and now longed in vain for the blessings they there appreciated so little. "Sad were we," they murmured, "in the sweet air which rejoices in the sunshine. Now are we sad in the filthy mud."

After walking by the side of the lake for a little distance, Dante and Virgil came to a tower, on the summit of which appeared two little flames, which were immediately answered by a corresponding flame from a tower on the other side of the lake. This was the signal for a boat to appear, and the next moment

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one sped across the water and waited to take them over it. Inside was a boatman named Phlegyas, and he greeted Dante with some rough words, thinking, as so many others had done, that he was a sinner come to stay there, and to be punished, but Virgil explained that Dante had not come to remain, and Phlegyas subsided in baffled rage. As the poets passed across the water, one of the spirits rose from it and seized hold of the sides of the boat, accosting Dante as he did so; but Dante replied to him with scorn, recognizing him as a Florentine knight of very proud disposition and fiery temper, who was called Filippo Argenti (silver) from the fact that he had his horse shod with silver. Then Virgil seized the hands of the miserable creature and loosening their hold from the boat, thrust him back into the miry water; and he turned to Dante and embraced him, expressing his approval of the scorn and indignation that he displayed. It may seem a little cruel perhaps at first sight that they should have treated

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Argenti in this way, but Dante wished to teach the lesson, that a scorn of what is really contemptible is a right kind of scorn, and that the pride which refused to have intercourse with what is unworthy is very different from the pride which had been Argenti's sin, and which had led him into acts of oppression to those weaker than himself. The boat then drew near to the City of Dis, through which the poets were obliged to pass on their downward journey, and the tower and domes of which glowed before them with a lurid light from out the surrounding darkness. As they entered the outer moat, Dante noticed that the walls seemed to be of iron, and the boat had to go some distance round them before coming to a spot where it was possible for them to enter; but suddenly Phlegyas cried out, "Out with you, here is the entrance." The poets then landed, little thinking of the horrible experience which lay before them, for as they did so they were confronted by an awful sight. Above those iron walls and fire-illumined

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turrets appeared more than a thousand of the angels who fell from Heaven with Satan, demanding fiercely how Dante could expect to pass through the realms of the dead, seeing that he was himself a living man. Virgil made a sign that he would speak to them apart, and the demons assented to this with an eagerness which filled Dante with dismay, saying that Virgil could stay there while Dante retraced his steps alone. Dante implored Virgil not to leave him, but Virgil told him not to fear, since his journey had been willed by Heaven, and could not be prevented by the inhabitants of Hell, and he assured him that he would not forsake him. So Virgil advanced to speak to the demons, and Dante awaited him half-trusting yet half-fearful. He had not long to wait in uncertainty, however. The demons seem to have come down to meet Virgil outside the gate, but when they had spoken together but a very short time, they all rushed back within the city, shutting the gates behind them and leaving

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Virgil outside. The fear which had seized Dante before was increased, when he found that even Virgil had failed to persuade the demons, and when he saw him returning with downcast eyes and all the courage gone from his demeanour. It was a truly awful position in which the two poets were placed, for before them rose the impassable walls of the fortress, defended by more than a thousand demons, who had already shown their evil disposition towards them, and behind them extended the horrible swamp, which they could not repass had they wished, since the boat which had brought them over it was no longer there. Besides, even if it had been there, Dante knew that his only hope of reaching the joy which was promised to him when he should meet Beatrice and be shown Paradise, was by pursuing his journey, however difficult it might be. Virgil seemed, however, to have some half-defined hope, which he did not communicate to Dante. He stood as if he was listening intently, and strained

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his eyes through the darkness and mist which lay on the lake, and he muttered disjointed sentences which seemed to imply that he felt they might still conquer in spite of all obstacles. But as they stood waiting, and half-expectant for Dante knew not what, their attention was suddenly riveted to the summit of the Tower before them, where a fresh horror and danger appeared. There in all their hideous horror stood the Furies, the three women from Greek mythology who represent the pangs of an avenging conscience. Round their waists were green hydras, a kind of serpent with seven heads, and their flowing locks consisted of vipers. There they stood, Megæra, Alecto, and Tisiphone, tearing their breasts and beating their hands and shrieking in such awful tones that Dante clasped Virgil in a paroxysm of terror. But a greater horror even than this now threatened them. In Greek mythology we read of a personage named Medusa, who had the power of turning those who looked upon her into

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stone, and as the poets stood trembling, the Furies filled them with still greater dread by the words: "Let Medusa come, and we will turn him into hard stone." The full meaning of this threat was better understood by Virgil than by Dante. He realized that if once Dante beheld Medusa, he would indeed be turned into stone where he stood, and could never leave those regions of pain and dread, or hope to visit the realms on high. No time was to be lost, for at any moment that strange head with the weird power might appear on the walls and Dante's fate be sealed. With his own hands Virgil turned Dante round, and blindfolded his eyes to prevent any chance of his seeing her, but now, as in the Dark Wood, when the prospect seemed most hopeless for Dante, help was in reality drawing near. As the poets stood with their backs to the walls of the city, a strange sound, which seemed to make both shores of the lake tremble, struck their ears, and at first, as this mysterious sound increased

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with the mighty onward rush of a storm in a forest, Dante's heart was filled with fear of a fresh danger, but when Virgil released his eyes and bade him direct them across the lake, he saw what soon put all his fears to flight. For moving over the waters as though they were dry land, and waving the thick air from before his face as he did so, there advanced one whom Dante recognized as a Heavenly Messenger. As he approached, the vile spirits in the lake hurried away from his holy presence, and when he reached the gates of Dis, a few scornful words addressed to the demons within soon caused them to disperse. Then, with a touch of his hand, the mighty iron gates opened, and the Heavenly Messenger returned in the direction from whence he came, leaving the poets free to continue the journey which lay before them. Thus was Dante shown how evil is put to immediate flight by Heavenly grace, and how those who trust to it need in reality feel no fear even if great difficulties and temptations await them.

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CHAPTER VI

THE RED RIVER AND THE STRANGE FOREST

"The river . . .
Approaches, in the which all those are steeped
Who have by violence injured.

. . . . . .

We enter'd on a forest, where no track
Of steps had worn a way. Not verdant there
The foliage, but of dusky hue; not light
The boughs and tapering, but with knares deform'd
And matted thick: fruits there were none, but thorns
Instead, with venom fill'd.

Inferno, cantos xii, xiii.

SO now Dante had overcome one more great difficulty, and with the renewed strength and hopefulness which follow conquest, he entered the strange city which had been so closely defended against him. All signs of the demons had disappeared when he and Virgil found themselves within, and instead of a city

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in the ordinary sense Dante saw great tombs from which flames issued. From one of these tombs a figure raised itself with such a haughty demeanour that he seemed to hold even Hell itself in scorn, and Virgil named him as Farinata, a proud Florentine noble, whose name all loyal Florentines had cause to remember with gratitude. A few years before Dante's birth, a great battle had been fought near Florence between the Ghibellines or adherents of the Emperor, and the Guelphs or adherents of the Pope, and after it was over, the Ghibellines, who were victorious, had proposed to burn the city of Florence to the ground. This proposal would probably have been carried into effect, and Florence with all its fine buildings would have been destroyed, if it had not been for Farinata, who was the only member of his party to oppose the suggestion.

Dante had much interesting conversation with Farinata about Florence and the state of things there, and here, as throughout his great

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journey, we find him greeting any fellow-countryman of his own with an eager interest, which proves how much he loved the place which at the time when he wrote his poem had treated him so ill.

There was another Florentine near to Farinata with whom Dante also had some conversation, and this was a man named Cavalcante, whose son Guido had been a very great friend of Dante's and was himself well known as a poet. In those early days in Florence, which to Dante were now a memory half sweet, half painful, the days when he had waited about the narrow streets watching for a glimpse of Beatrice as she passed down them, when he had been full of eager hope and longing, and the future lay as a bright prospect before him, he and Guido had been boon companions who shared each other's joys and sorrows, and read and criticized each other's early poetic efforts. All had changed since then. Beatrice had passed from Dante's material world and become his guiding-star from

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Heaven, and at about the time when he supposes his great vision to have taken place, he and Guido had been separated by political differences, which led to the latter being banished as Dante himself was later. But Guido's father, knowing how great the friendship was between them at the time of his own death, expected when he saw Dante that his son would be with him, and asked the reason why he was not, with great anxiety. Dante, remembering how Guido had failed to share his admiration for Virgil, replied that perhaps that was the reason, but something in his way of expressing this gave Cavalcante reason to think that his son was no longer alive, and this so overcame him with sorrow that he sank back within the tomb. Dante, however, left a message for him with Farinata to say that Guido was still enjoying the sweet light of heaven, though as a matter of fact he died very soon after this time, from a fever caught during his exile from Florence.

But Dante himself had still a long and toil-

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some journey to accomplish before he could see the light of day again, so he and Virgil now left the two Florentines, and moved onwards down a path where they had to scramble over great masses of rock, some of which swayed beneath the weight of Dante, and so came to a boiling red river, in which murderers and tyrants were punished. They were met by a band of strange creatures called Centaurs, half man and half horse, who, like many of the curious personages that Dante met in Hell, are taken from Greek mythology. These Centaurs were each armed with bow and arrows which they discharged at any sinners who raised themselves too far out of the river, and at the sight of the poets three of them came forward, aiming their arrows at them, and warning them that unless they explained where they were going they would shoot them.

Virgil replied that he would answer this inquiry to one of them whom he named as Chiron, and reproved them at the same time for

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their hasty impatience. The Centaurs were impressed by his manner, and Chiron listened courteously while Virgil explained the object of their journey, and when he had finished he turned to one of his companions and chose him to act as their guide over the river, which from where they stood it seemed impossible for Dante to pass. The Centaur, whose name was Nessus, led them along a rough path by the side of the river, which became less deep as they went on, until it was so shallow that only the feet of those in it were covered. Amongst those in the deeper part he pointed out to Dante, Dionysius the cruel tyrant of Syracuse, and Guy of Montfort, who murdered the English Prince Henry, nephew of Henry III, in front of the altar during High Mass in a church at Viterbo. When they came to a place where the river was so shallow that Dante could easily walk across, the Centaur left him and Virgil, who on the other side of it found themselves in a thick dark wood, where no

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pathway was to be seen, and which was as unlike the woods of earth, where the golden sunshine flickers through the green leaves, as the lake I have told you about was to an earthly lake. The leaves of this wood were of a dull dark colour on which no ray of sunshine had ever fallen, and the branches instead of being lithe and graceful and of exquisite form, were twisted and gnarled into hard ungainly shapes, and instead of flowers or fruit they only bore poisonous thorns. There was something else also, which we are accustomed to think of as one of the great charms of a wood, wanting here. We all know how delightful it is as we walk beneath the trees to hear the sweet voices of the birds as they fill the air with melody, and to see their feathered forms flitting from bough to bough, but in this wood, instead of birds, horrible monsters called Harpies, with the face of an ugly woman and the body of a fierce vulture, made their nests, and filled the air with mournful cries.

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Dante was puzzled when he first entered the wood by another sound than that made by the Harpies, and which seemed to be that of people wailing somewhere within, although no sign of any one was to be seen. He thought at first that they must be hidden from sight somewhere among the thick trees; but what was really the truth about them was much too strange and wonderful to occur to him, and when he discovered it, the discovery was one which filled him with pity and horror. At Virgil's suggestion he put out his hand and plucked a small branch from a tree near, and then to his amazement the tree itself spoke to him. "Why do you rend me? Have you no spirit of pity?" it wailed, and added, "We were once men who are now trees." Dante was not by any means without a spirit of pity; he had, on the contrary, a very tender, pitying heart, and now, when he realized that he had actually added to the suffering of the unfortunate man who had been turned into a tree, he was struck with

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horror and dismay. Virgil too was grieved at the result of what they had done, and he begged the spirit to tell them who he had been on the earth, that Dante might make amends to him by reviving his fame there. The tree then told them that he was Pier delle Vigne, a man whose name must have been well known to Dante. He had been Chancellor to the Emperor Frederick II, who died in 1250, and was also amongst the earliest writers of Italian verse. He was a great favourite with his master, who trusted him very much, until some of the other courtiers became jealous of the favour shown to him, and for this reason tried to poison the Emperor's mind against him by accusing him of high treason. The Emperor seems to have believed what was told him, although it was really quite untrue, and Pier was innocent of any evil designs; but, instead of behaving in a brave and honourable way and trying to prove to the Emperor how false the charges against him were, Pier acted in the most

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cowardly and wicked manner he could have chosen, and took his life with his own hands. It was for this great crime that he was punished by being turned into a tree as Dante had seen.

Dante was so moved with pity at this sad story of cowardice and dishonour, that though he would have liked to ask the spirit a few more questions, he was too much overcome to do so, and before he had had time fully to recover himself, his attention was diverted from the unfortunate Pier by a loud noise of hurrying footsteps and breaking branches, and turning in its direction he saw a sad and startling sight. Two spirits, one of which turned out to be a Florentine and the other a Siennese, came rushing through the forest, tearing down branches as they forced their eager way through, and pursuing them, Dante, to his horror and dismay, saw a pack of fierce black mastiffs, as fleet of foot as greyhounds. The unfortunate spirits had not a chance against them, and as one of them,

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named Jacopo da Sant' Andrea, sank down fainting and exhausted, and tried to protect himself against a small tree near, the dogs seized him and tore him limb from limb. The bush against which he had sought shelter also suffered severely in the contest, and as Dante and Virgil drew near it, they heard it wail, "O, Jacopo da Sant' Andrea, what use was it to make a screen of me? What blame is mine for thy evil life?" and they saw that the unfortunate speaker was bleeding from all the places where the leaves had been rudely torn. Virgil asked the spirit within to tell them who he had been on earth, and when they heard that he was a Florentine, Dante was moved once more by love of his native place, and though the spirit made the melancholy confession, that he had ended his life by his own act in a most cowardly and disgraceful way, the fact of his being a Florentine led Dante to replace the fallen leaves with tender, compassionate hands.

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CHAPTER VII

THE ARID PLAIN

"A plain we reach'd, that from its sterile bed
Each plant repell'd. The mournful wood waves round
Its garland on all sides, as round the wood
Spreads the sad foss."

Inferno, canto xiv.

FROM the Human Forest, Dante's journey brought him to an arid, desolate plain, where there were no trees or vegetation, and where flakes of fire fell continually on the inhabitants, some of whom lay prone on the ground, while others sat huddled together, and others again were compelled to move continually onward. The quiet regular fall of these burning flakes reminded Dante of snowstorms on the high Alps when there is no wind, as he watched the spirits trying in vain to waft

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them away with their hands, while even the sand beneath them was set on fire by the persistent fall. These spirits were blasphemers, and amid them Dante's attention was especially struck by one who seemed contemptuous of even this torture, and took no notice of the falling flakes, from which the other spirits tried in vain to escape. As usual, he turned to Virgil for information, but the spirit overheard the question himself, and answered it with words of defiant blasphemy. "O, Capaneus," cried Virgil, on hearing them, "by thy own pride thou art the more afflicted;" and he then told Dante that this was one of the seven kings who laid siege to Thebes. Thebes was the chief city of Bœotia, in Greece, and round it gather many of the ancient Greek myths. It was said that its fortifications were formed by the musician Amphion, at the sound of whose marvellous playing, the stones themselves moved into their places. It was the scene of a long and famous siege, in which seven kings took part, and Capaneus was

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one of the seven. He was blasphemous then as when he appeared to Dante now, and in punishment, Jupiter killed him by lightning as he was scaling the walls of Thebes, so that he died just at the proud moment when he was likely to enter the town. His body was burnt, as was the custom with the Greeks, and a pathetic incident completes the story, for it is related that his wife Evadne, overcome by grief at the loss of her husband, leapt into the flames herself, and was burnt with him. Virgil, however, did not encourage Dante to spend much time with this spirit, whose defiant blasphemy filled him with such indignation that in addressing him, his voice, which we remember Dante spoke of when first they met as "hoarse from long disuse," was louder than he had ever heard it before.

Passing along by the side of the wood which skirted the plain, and keeping as close to the latter as possible to avoid the flakes of burning snow, the poets came to a mysterious stream of a red hue, the sight of which filled

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Dante with wonder as he saw it flow between its stony banks. Virgil told him that it was called Phlegython, and he described its course and that of the other rivers in Hell to Dante, who was puzzled, however, to find that the river Lethe, whose waters wash away memory, was not named among them. But, as Virgil explained, forgetfulness has no part in Hell, where remorse for past sins forms a great part of the punishment, and Dante must wait to see Lethe until he reached Purgatory. Along the shores of Phlegython walked a group of spirits, who peered at the poets, reminding Dante of people who are trying to see anything by the feeble light of a new moon, or of an old tailor trying to thread a needle. Dante and Virgil were above these spirits, who walked beneath the rocky banks on a margin with the stream, and suddenly one of them, looking up as he passed, recognized Dante, and seized his coat in joyful eagerness, crying, "What wonderful chance!" and Dante cried out

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with equal surprise, "What, Ser Brunetto, art thou here?" as he recognized his own former tutor and friend in the burned and scarred features before him.

The two friends then conversed together as they moved slowly on, Dante afraid to descend to the side of Brunetto on account of the heat, and Brunetto unable to stand still, because it was part of his punishment to be always moving. Dante gives us their conversation, by which we are shown a very interesting glimpse of their relationship, though the pleasure of their meeting must have been much spoilt to Dante by the thought that his friend had sinned and was suffering punishment. In spite of this, he still looked upon Brunetto with reverent gratitude for the part he played in his own life, and remembered, with tender gratitude, "the dear fatherly image" of his former tutor, who when on earth taught him how man may become immortal, and instilled into his mind those lessons which were

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afterwards to bear such splendid fruit. He told Brunetto how he came to undertake the journey, and Brunetto foretold to him the high destiny which awaited him if he but followed his star; finding some consolation in his suffering from the thought that his beloved pupil would win the best kind of fame and make a nobler use of his time and talents than he himself had done. When at last they reached a point where they had to part, since Dante must continue his journey onward, and to Brunetto it was not permitted to go farther, the latter made to Dante the parting request that he would take care of a book called *The Treasure*, which was Brunetto's principal work. Then the limit of his walk being reached, he hurried back with the speed of one about to win a race.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE RIVER OF PITCH

" Boiled here a glutinous thick mass, that round
Limed all the shore beneath."

Inferno, canto xxi.

AS Dante went deeper into the Inferno, he learnt more and more how terrible it is to sin, how evil brings its own punishment with it, and how ugly a wicked life makes the soul. It was a very sad and painful lesson for him, but we must never forget that through it all he was being led to purer and better things, and being prepared for a sight of the glorious joy which Beatrice would show him, when he reached her.

After he and Brunetto had parted he came to a region called Malebolge, or Evil Pits, where many different kinds of fraud and

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deceit were punished. It lay much lower than the part of the Inferno which he had already passed through, and in order to reach it he had an experience which was one of the most terrifying he had met with yet. On the edge of the abyss which had to be descended, and where the noise of the stream as it fell into the gulf below was almost deafening, Dante, in obedience to a command from Virgil, unloosed a cord which he wore as a girdle, from round his waist, and handed it to him, and Virgil, to Dante's wonder, flung it into the abyss. The result of this action was even more wonderful and extraordinary than the action itself, and Dante felt he could hardly expect his readers to believe what now he saw before him. For out of the darkness a huge form appeared slowly swimming upwards through the thick heavy air, and at length reached the brink of the precipice, where it rested the upper part of the body, leaving its great tail however still hanging over the precipice. This was Geryon, the representative of fraud and deceit, and

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CHAPTER VIII

THE RIVER OF PITCH

"Boiled here a glutinous thick mass, that round
Limed all the shore beneath."

Inferno, canto xxi.

AS Dante went deeper into the Inferno, he learnt more and more how terrible it is to sin, how evil brings its own punishment with it, and how ugly a wicked life makes the soul. It was a very sad and painful lesson for him, but we must never forget that through it all he was being led to purer and better things, and being prepared for a sight of the glorious joy which Beatrice would show him, when he reached her.

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THIS WAS GERYON, THE REPRESENTATIVE OF FRAUD AND DECEIT.

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therefore emblematic of the special kind of sin punished below. If you only looked at its face, it seemed to be a man of just disposition, but if you carried the glance further, its body was seen to be that of an enormous reptile, with a tail armed like that of a scorpion with a deadly sting. While Virgil went forward to speak with the monster alone, Dante looked at some spirits who were sitting weeping on the edge of the circle they were just leaving. These were Usurers, or people who make a business of lending money at a very high rate of interest, and now each one was gazing intently at the empty purse which he wore hanging from his neck. As Dante drew nearer to them, he noticed that on each of these purses there was a coat-of-arms showing to what house its owner belonged. One was an azure lion on a yellow ground, and another a white goose on a blood-red ground, and another again an azure sow on a white ground. But Dante had been warned by Virgil not to spend much time with these spirits, so after

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looking at the purses he returned to the spot where he had left Virgil talking to the monster, and on doing so he found him already mounted on its back. Well may Dante's heart have sunk with fear at the sight, and when Virgil called to him to be brave, and mount beside him,—for by this means they were to descend the great gulf that yawned below,—warning him at the same time to keep well out of reach of the tail as it played dangerously to and fro, he trembled at first as though he had the ague. But Dante was a man of strong courage, and shame at his cowardice soon conquered his fear sufficiently for him to take his place in front of Virgil on the monster's back, though he still found himself unable to form words in which to ask Virgil to hold him safely. Virgil, however, could always tell what was passing in Dante's mind, and he answered his unexpressed wish by clasping him tightly, as Geryon slowly began to turn round until his head was where his tail had been before; he then plunged into

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the abyss, beating the air with his arms, as he bore the poets through space until they reached the beginning of Malebolge, where to Dante's great relief he deposited them safely at the foot of a rock.

The path which Dante and Virgil had then to take was very rough and rocky, and sometimes Dante's courage almost failed at the difficulties and dangers of the journey, but Virgil was always at hand to urge him on with encouraging words or to give him practical help if necessary. As they passed along they looked down into various pits, in each of which was punished a different form of sin. In one were Flatterers, and in another Simonists, those who bought or sold offices in the Church, and were so called after Simon the Sorcerer, of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles (viii. 18). Dante had a special contempt for this sin; he describes the Simonists as placed head downwards in fiery holes, and amongst them he mentions several Popes, whose sins of cupidity and

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avarice he denounces in terms of burning contempt. After leaving them behind, Dante next looked down on a procession of Soothsayers and false Prophets, who moved slowly along, weeping bitterly, and some of whom had their heads twisted round so they could only see behind them, instead of before, as a special punishment for pretending to see the future when on earth. Dante was so moved by pity when he looked at them, that he leant against a rock and wept too, until Virgil roused him and pointed out to him some of the spirits as they passed. First he saw Amphiaraus, who, like Capaneus the blasphemer, was one of the seven kings who besieged Thebes, and near him a soothsayer of Thebes named Tiresias, and a false prophet named Aruns, who had dwelt in a lonely cave near to the white marble mountains of Carrara, whence he could see a wide expanse of sea and sky. And after them came a woman whose head was turned so that her long loose hair fell over her bosom, and this

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was one of special interest to Virgil and through him to Dante, for her name was Manto, and it was after her that Mantua, Virgil's birthplace, was named. Virgil for this reason told Dante her story. She was the daughter of Tiresias the soothsayer, and after her native city of Thebes had passed into a state of slavery to a foreign power, and her father had died, she wandered through Italy, until at length she came to a lonely plain in the North, where, far from the haunts of men, she thought she could live undisturbed with her women and practise the unholy arts she had learnt from her father. There at length she died, but her fame would seem to have spread, for after her death men came from the surrounding districts, and over her dead bones they built a city which they named after her, and this was the beginning of Mantua.

Other soothsayers and prophets were identified by the poets, and then they passed to the next pit, where those guilty of dis-

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honesty in their public office were punished. This sin is called *baratteria* in Italian, and is the very one of which Dante himself was accused by his fellow-townsmen when they banished him. He has shown how much he loathed it, by placing those guilty of it in a river of seething pitch, from which attendant demons with their hooks prevented any escape. These demons were so fierce, and seemed so evil-disposed, that Virgil told Dante to keep out of sight behind a rock, while he advanced to speak to them alone as he had done with the demons at the gates of Dis. At first they made a fierce rush towards him, menacing him with their hooks, but Virgil checked them by his calm, dignified demeanour, for even vice and malice is cowed and sinks back ashamed before courage and the strength which comes from virtue; and when he had explained the nature of his journey to one of them, named Malaconda, who came forward to represent the others, Malaconda bade them let him pass in safety.

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So Virgil called to Dante to come from his hiding-place and join him, and together they passed through the crowd of demons, who in obedience to Malaconda's order stood aside while they did so, though Dante's heart sank at the sight of their malicious faces, more especially as he heard from their whispers to each other that they could hardly refrain from rushing forward with their hooks and attacking him as he passed them. Malaconda, however, restrained them, and the poets passed through their midst in safety. But, before leaving this pit, Dante encountered another great danger and had another curious escape. The office of the demons, as I have said, was to prevent the sinners who were being punished in the boiling pitch, from escaping. If one but so much as raised his back or his head out of it, one of the demons would rush at him with his hook and attack him, so that his suffering was even greater than if he had remained below. Now as Dante walked on the path above, he saw to his dismay one of the

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spirits come out of the pitch, and immediately a demon caught him by his matted hair and held him aloft, while others seized him and tore him with their hooks. This spirit managed to free himself by a trick. On earth he had been deceitful and dishonest, and now his character was the same. He told the demons that if they would free him and stand aside for a minute, he would remain where he was and give a whistle, in answer to which seven of his fellow-sufferers would appear, and the demons be able to catch them too. The demons did as he asked, but the spirit, instead of keeping his promise, took the opportunity of making his escape and plunged back into the pitch himself. The demons were greatly enraged at this, and as they had lost one prey they turned their attention to Dante, who was the only other available. Dante, who was already sufficiently horrified at the scene he had witnessed, was now filled with terror for his own safety as he saw the hideous forms of the demons draw near him

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in pursuit, and it seemed impossible for him to escape from them, as the path before him was not only very rocky, but a steep precipice, which was very difficult to descend. But Dante now shows us how love and tenderness can overcome even great dangers and difficulties, for at the sight of his peril Virgil caught up Dante as a mother would her little child, thinking of nothing but him and his danger, if suddenly aroused by an alarm of fire; and thus bearing him tenderly in his arms, he passed with amazing speed down the rocky slope, and never paused until the demons were left behind and they were once more in safety.

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CHAPTER IX

THE LAND OF THE SETTING SUN

"Forth I sailed
Into the deep illimitable main,
With but one bark, and the small faithful band
That yet cleaved to me."

Inferno, canto xxvi.

THE two poets next looked down on a long procession of painted people, moving with very slow steps and wearing cloaks with cowls such as monks wear, only gilded on the outside. These were Hypocrites, and the cowls were in reality made of lead though they appeared to be gold, just as the Hypocrites themselves had appeared fair and good outwardly to deceive people and conceal their bad lives. These cowls were a dreadful weight, and caused much suf-

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fering to their wearer, who could only move very slowly in consequence. Two of them spoke to Dante, and he recognized them as members of a religious order called the Joyous Friars, because members of it were often guilty of using money given to them for the poor on their own enjoyment, and instead of living a life of poverty such as a friar was supposed to lead, of surrounding themselves with luxury. These two had also been guilty of another form of hypocrisy in Dante's own city of Florence, where, while pretending to preserve peace, they had really helped one party against the other and caused a fierce fray to ensue. Dante was only an infant when this happened, but he must often have heard the story, and even in his own day the ruins of many houses burnt and pillaged in one quarter of the town still bore witness to the sins of these two men.

But I must pass on to the story of Ulysses, which is one of the most interesting

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from Dante's journey through Malebolge. After he and Virgil had left the slow procession of the Hypocrites some distance behind them, they came to a bridge of rock, and looking down from it into a valley beneath, they saw a number of moving lights which reminded Dante of glow-worms as he had seen them lighting up some valley after dark on earth. He felt so much interested in these lights, which were constantly moving to and fro in the darkness, that he leant too far over the edge of the bridge, and only saved himself from falling by catching hold of a piece of rock. As some of the lights moved nearer to where he was, Dante saw that they were large flames, and was especially struck by one, which was forked or divided into two at the summit. He was still more interested when Virgil told him that within were the two Greek warriors, Ulysses and Diomed, and he entreated Virgil to allow him to remain where they were long enough to speak to them. For Dante had

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read about these two men in Virgil's own poem, the *Æneid*, where he relates how after besieging Troy ten years with the rest of the Greek army, they caused it to be taken by stratagem, for which deception they were now being punished. The stratagem was this: the Greeks erected an enormous wooden structure in the form of a gigantic horse, but quite hollow, so that it could conceal a number of armed men inside, and when it was completed some of them, amongst whom were Ulysses and Diomed, hid inside it, and sent a man named Sinon to persuade the Trojans that destruction would come to the Greeks if this horse was dragged within the city of Troy. The foolish Trojans believed that Sinon had brought a message from the gods, and that the siege would be ended if they did as he advised. So the wooden monster was dragged inside the town, and at night, when the Trojans were sleeping happily, Sinon opened a door in the side of the monster, and out sprang Ulysses and the

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other armed men, who in their turn opened the gates of Troy to the remainder of the Greek army waiting outside, and thus it was that Troy fell.

All this Dante knew, and he knew all about the adventures of Æneas the Trojan, who escaped from the burning city carrying his aged father on his back and leading his little son Ascanius by the hand, for Virgil relates all this in the great poem which Dante loved so much, but as to what befell Ulysses the Greek hero, Dante did not know so well, for Virgil does not relate his fate. Homer tells us about some of his wanderings in his *Odyssey*, but even Homer does not tell us about the adventures which befell Ulysses on his last voyage, which he made after he had returned home from the Trojan war.

When the flame had come quite near to where the poets stood, Virgil addressed the spirits within, reminding them that he had a claim on their attention since he had written of them in his immortal verse, and

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asking Ulysses to tell them the story of this last voyage of his. Then the taller of the two flames began to swing to and fro, and from out of it, with a curious muffled sound, came the voice of the old Greek warrior.

He told them how, after the long and perilous wanderings by which he had returned to his home in Ithaca when the siege of Troy was over, a restless longing came over him to start on fresh adventures. He had long been used to the excitement of travel and warfare, for the siege of Troy had lasted ten years, and he had spent many years after that on his journey home, and had encountered many thrilling adventures on the way, so it is not surprising if he found it difficult to settle down and stay quietly in one place, and though he greatly loved his wife Penelope, who had watched and waited for him all the long years of his absence, and though it was a true joy to him to see her, and to have her

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society and that of his son Telemachus, who had spent many years searching for his father, he could not resist the longing to travel further. He longed, too, to gain more experience and to learn still more fully what constitutes nobility and virtue in a man. For Ulysses was one of those who are always learning, and the fact that he had already had more experience than most men only made him feel how small his knowledge still was, and to long all the more to increase it. So he bade farewell to his faithful wife, and to his old father and to his son, and started off again in a small boat, with the same companions who had shared his dangers and difficulties before. They sailed from Greece between the coasts of Morocco on the one side and of Sardinia and the other Mediterranean islands on the other, and so at last, after much toil through the Straits of Gibraltar, and out into the great open ocean which lay beyond it; for the aim of Ulysses was to discover the far-away land which lay

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beyond the Western sea. And now it would seem that the companions of Ulysses began to waver. So far as they knew, no one had passed those boundaries before, and they were growing old and spent with toil, and probably wished to return to rest in their homes before they died, instead of venturing into the mysterious, unknown region whence it was uncertain whether they would ever come back. But Ulysses stirred up their imagination, by reminding them of the wonderful unpeopled worlds which might be before them in the far West, where the sun sets, and he urged them to go forward and to remember that they had high aims before them, and that they were born to fulfil a noble purpose in the world, not just to live and die with nothing accomplished, like the brute creation. So, fired with a new courage and determination, they all set hand again to the oars and sped on over the great ocean, with the East behind them, and the unknown mys-

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terious land where the sun sets, before. As we read we are reminded of another hero who lived many centuries later than Ulysses, and who was not born at the time when Dante wrote his poem. But Columbus and his comrades met with a success which did not await the earlier adventurers. They travelled on for five months and still no sight of land came to reward them, until at last they saw in the far distance the dim shadowy outline of a high mountain, towards which they hastened, fired with joyful expectation. But death overtook them in the moment of victory, for as they drew near to it a whirlwind arose from the shore to meet them, and struck the boat with so much force, that it swung round helplessly three times before it, and at the third time the stern rose and the prow sank, and the next moment the wild waters had closed over Ulysses and his brave companions for ever.

This was the story of the last voyage of Ulysses, which Dante heard now for the

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first time, and in spite of its tragic ending, I think he must have been glad to know that the grand old Greek perished in a worthy and heroic manner, while seeking the unknown, ideal land beyond the sunset, which he had made it his aim to discover.

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CHAPTER X

THE TOWER OF HUNGER

"The hour drew near
When they were wont to bring us food; the mind
Of each misgave him through his dream, and I
Heard, at its outlet underneath locked up
The horrible tower; whence, uttering not a word,
I looked upon the visage of my sons."

Inferno, canto xxxiii.

WHEN Dante and Virgil had passed through all the circles of Malebolge, there was still another descent before them to a yet lower region, and it is during Dante's journey through this that we meet with the story of Ugolino, one of the saddest of all that he tells us. But first I must tell you of the strange manner in which they left Malebolge. After they had passed its last circle, they found themselves in a region

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where the light was so faint that Dante could hardly distinguish anything around him. In the distance were some objects which he at first thought to be great towers, but suddenly a loud trumpet blast sounded from one of them, and Virgil told him that, instead of being towers, they were huge giants standing half-immersed in a moat, so that, great though their size appeared, it was really only half of it that he saw. As they advanced, Dante saw for himself the truth of Virgil's words, and was seized with terror at the sight of the giants—of whose size he gives us some idea, by saying that the face of one of them was larger than a bronze cone which stood on St. Peter's in Rome, and measured six and a half feet, and that the height from the waist to the hair was greater than that of three very tall men put together. One of these giants was uttering some confused gibberish, and Virgil told Dante that he was Nimrod, through whose presumption language was first confused, and

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part of whose punishment now was that he could neither speak so as to be understood, nor understand other people. Another giant, even bigger and fiercer-looking than Nimrod, was Ephialtes, one of a race of giants who rebelled against Jupiter. He was swaying to and fro in a manner which was very alarming to Dante, until he noticed that even his strength was powerless against some mighty chains, by which his limbs were bound. The poets passed him and came to Antæus, who is said once to have captured a thousand lions with his own hands, and eventually to have been slain by Hercules. Virgil addressed him, and asked his aid in descending to the lower region through which they had still to pass, and the giant stretched out his great right hand, and with it seized Virgil, who bade Dante to cling closely to him, so that the two would make one burden. Then the mighty form of the giant began to bend, and Dante, amid all the terror of his position, was reminded by it of the

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Carisenda, a curious leaning tower in Bologna, when clouds rapidly pass over it in a contrary direction, making it appear even more out of the perpendicular than usual.

Then, moving slowly, Antæus at length deposited his burden safely below, and this done, rose rapidly back to an upright position, as the mast of a ship does in stormy weather at sea.

So now Dante and Virgil had reached the lower part of the Inferno, and were almost at the end of this part of the great journey. In the upper part they had seen where the violent and those guilty of evil passions met with their reward; in Malebolge they had passed through the regions of deceit and fraud, and now they were in a region where was punished the sin which Dante considered the lowest and most ignoble of any—the sin of treachery. Before them spread a lake of ice, and in this the spirits were frozen, with only their heads appearing above the surface, and amongst these Dante came across

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Ugolino, whose story I am about to give you.

At the time when Dante was a boy in Florence, there was a great deal of fighting and disturbance between the town of Pisa and other neighbouring States, and while this was going on Ugolino had been appointed to an office called Captain-of-the-People, which put a great deal of power in his hands, and proved the esteem and trust in which he was held by the people of Pisa. But Ugolino, instead of showing himself worthy of this trust, abused it, and was guilty of great treachery. He obtained peace for Pisa by a treaty which contained a secret condition, admitting her enemies into her fortresses. For a time everything seemed to go well with Ugolino; his power increased, and he was filled with triumph at his success, but his treachery was to be punished by treachery. There was in Pisa another powerful man, the Archbishop Roger, who pretended to be Ugolino's friend, but who was in reality his

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worst enemy, and was working secretly against him. By his plots Ugolino was betrayed to the Pisans, who arrested him when at the height of his power, and with his two sons and two grandsons he was imprisoned in a tower, to which his sad fate afterwards gave the name of TOWER OF HUNGER. As Dante gazed down at him in the frozen lake, Ugolino himself related the remainder of his story. For many months, he said, they languished in this prison. There was a tiny opening which served as a window, in the walls of the Tower, and through this Ugolino could see when there was a moon, and thus kept some rough calculations of time, and at last when he had seen glimpses of many moons there came a night in which he had an evil dream. It seemed to him in it that he saw a wolf with its cubs being chased by the Archbishop Roger and some hounds on the hillside outside Pisa, where stood the very fortresses he had so basely betrayed; and before they had

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gone far the wolves seemed to be weary, and Ugolino beheld them overtaken and torn to pieces by the hounds. And from this dream, in which he seemed to see himself and his children in the wolves, and the Pisan people in the hounds, he awoke before dawn to hear the cries of his children, who in their sleep were calling out for bread. They too awoke, and the hour came at which such miserable food as was allowed the prisoners was generally served them; and filled by their dreams with a terrible foreboding, the unhappy prisoners listened in silence and eager suspense for the sound of the opening door. We can picture the dismay and horror which would seize them when, instead of this welcome sound, was heard another—that of the key being turned from the outside—and they knew that they were being locked in to starve. Ugolino himself probably realized more fully what this meant than his sons and grandsons did. He would know better than they did the fierce, relentless character of his

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enemy, Archbishop Roger; and how much he had done to incur his hatred and that of the Pisan people whom he had pretended to serve. But now his sin, as is generally the case, was visited not only on himself, but on other innocent persons; and the bitterest part of his punishment was to be the sight of their distress. As the last sound of the key being turned died away, he gazed with speechless dismay at the faces of his children, who wept bitterly, though the heart of Ugolino himself seemed turned to stone, and no tears came to relieve his agony. Then his youngest grandson, who was probably quite a little boy, and of whom Ugolino speaks by the pet name of Anselmuccio (or dear little Anselmo), seems to have been frightened by his grandfather's strange, stony look, and not fully understanding the cause himself, cried—"Why gazest thou so; what aileth thee?" But, touched though Ugolino was by this pathetic appeal from the child, he still neither wept nor spoke. And so all that long day passed,

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and the rays of light through the opening in the wall grew fainter and fainter, and the horror of another night came and went, and once more the struggling beams of the morning sun penetrated the gloom of the dungeon. But the daylight brought no relief to the sufferings of Ugolino. On the contrary, it added to them by enabling him to see the change that the night had brought to the faces of those dear to him, and which now bore some of the same expression of horror and dismay which they had seen on his; and at this sight his grief became so great that he gnawed his own hands in a very excess of anguish. Then his four children came to him, overcome by the sight of his suffering, and thinking that starvation had led him to gnaw his hands, begged him to take their flesh instead for food. Ugolino was suffering worse tortures than those of hunger, though they knew it not. The agony of remorse was gnawing at his soul even as he had gnawed at his own

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hands, but touched by this offer of his children, he now controlled himself, that the sight of his sufferings "might not make them sadder." All that day passed in silent suffering, and another night came and went, and another day, and on the fourth day Gaddo, Ugolino's eldest son, cried—"Father, why dost thou not help me?" and fell at Ugolino's feet and died. Then for Ugolino was reserved the awful suffering of being powerless to help as one by one his two grandsons and remaining son also fell dead before him. And now the worst horror of all began for him, for death refused to come and end his sufferings; and for three more days he lingered on, alone with his dead, groping with feeble hands over their bodies, for weakness and suffering had nearly deprived him of his eyesight, calling in heart-breaking accents those dear names to which there was no one to respond. Then hunger at last did its work, and Ugolino died also.

This was the sad story to which Dante

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listened in silent sympathy, and at the end he breaks out into fierce anger against the Pisans. For Dante, in spite of his loathing of Ugolino's sin, was moved to great indignation at the thought of their cruel and wicked conduct towards him.

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CHAPTER XI

DAWN ON THE SHORE

"The dawn had chased the matin hour of prime
Which fled before it, so that from afar
I spied the trembling of the ocean stream."

Purgatory, canto i.

WHEN Dante had passed through all the regions of the Inferno, and seen the very worst traitor of all, the one who betrayed Jesus with a kiss—Judas Iscariot—his awful journey there was ended. He had already been shown in his vision how terrible sin is, but that was not all the lesson prepared for him. He was to learn also that even for great sinners there is redemption, and that those who turn to God and repent are granted His pardon, however much they may have transgressed; and he was to learn also

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that repentance is not an easy thing, and that by suffering and constant effort alone can the soul be freed from its burden of guilt.

After leaving the Inferno, he and Virgil found themselves in a dark passage in the solid rock, progress through which was very difficult and toilsome. It took them a whole day to make their way through it, but at last, very early on Easter morning, three days after Dante first met Virgil, they came to the opening, and pausing there, once more saw the stars. We can imagine how Dante must have rejoiced at the sight, after having been so far away from the light of heaven. The scene before him was a very beautiful one as he emerged from the rocky pass; the sun had not yet risen, and the sky was quite cloudless, and of that deep, intense blue which we see in the sapphire, and in the east shone the planet Venus (which shines so brightly as the morning or evening star), and to the south sparkled the wonderful constellation known as the Southern Cross, which

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is only to be seen south of the Equator. Before Dante stretched a vast ocean, still wrapt in the haze of very early morning, and behind him rose the steep Mountain of Purgatory, which he would soon have to ascend. After refreshing his tired eyes with this beautiful scene, Dante turned in a northerly direction, and saw before him an old man with a very long white beard, and a face on which the stars cast a light almost as strong as that of the sun itself. This was Cato, of whom we read in Roman history, and his office was to guard the shores of Purgatory. He saw that Dante was alive, and wondered to see him there; but when Virgil had explained, as he had done so many times before, how Dante had come to learn a great lesson, and that he himself had been sent by Beatrice to guide him, Cato was quite willing that he should continue his journey, though he told Virgil that before they went any further Dante must have his face cleansed from the stains left on it by his

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journey through Hell, and must be girded, as a symbol of humility, by a reed which he told them they would find growing on the margin of the sea, where the waves were constantly breaking. As Virgil and Dante, in obedience to this, started to walk across the plain which extended before them, Dante saw the sea trembling in the distance, and knew that the breeze which stirred it was the one which immediately precedes dawn, and that the light of the rising sun was already chasing away the shades of night. In his own heart also another day must have been dawning, for the dark shades of sin and despair were leaving it for ever, and a glowing hope for the future was already shining on it. The early dew still lay on the grass through which they passed, but Virgil knew that it would soon disappear now before the rising sun, and therefore seized the opportunity to plunge his hand in it and cleanse Dante's face, so that there were no longer the marks of his journey through Hell on it. I think

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that Dante wants to convey a lesson to us by those stains on his face, and it is that, even if not guilty ourselves, we cannot come into close contact with evil without it leaving some mark on us. He teaches the same thing more than once in the *Inferno*, where when disposed to linger too long in any place, Virgil warned him that he should "look and pass on," and showed by this that even the contemplation of evil is to be avoided. It would be well to think of this when we are tempted to read bad books, or to listen to conversation which we know to be wrong. After Dante's face had thus been cleansed, he and Virgil went on to the margin of the sea, and there Virgil plucked one of the reeds which grew on the shore, and were the only vegetation which could resist the force of the waves, and girded Dante with it; and, wonderful to relate, as soon as he had plucked it another one exactly similar grew in its place.

The poets, uncertain which way to take,

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then stood on the shore watching the sunrise, as slowly the lovely red and white of dawn changed, and above the eastern skies spread the golden light of day. As they watched, they suddenly saw a bright red light, which appeared far away on the horizon, and was coming towards them with a movement more rapid than that of a bird, and growing brighter and clearer as it approached. Then on each side of the light Dante saw something white, but of indistinct shape, and suddenly Virgil recognized that these were the white wings of one of God's messengers, and cried to Dante, "See that thou bend thy knees, and fold thy hands, for here is the Angel of God;" and as Dante obeyed Virgil pointed out to him how the angel was guiding and propelling the boat which contained the red light, by the force of his own wings, which acted as sails. But now, as he drew quite near to them, Dante found the splendour of the angel's appearance such that it dazzled his eyes, and it would be quite impossible,

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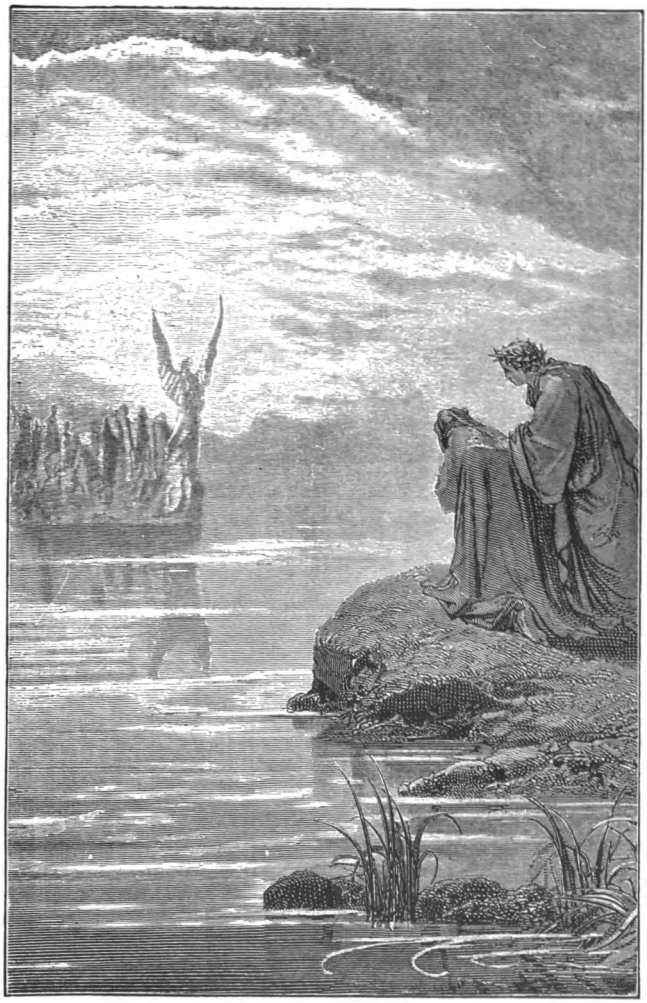

"SEE THAT THOU BEND THY KNEES, AND FOLD THY HANDS, FOR HERE IS THE ANGEL OF GOD."

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he says, to describe it. He stood in majestic beauty on the poop of the little vessel which bounded lightly over the waves, for there was no weight in it, the occupants being all spirits who were being brought to Purgatory. More than a hundred of them were assembled inside, and as they came to shore Dante heard them singing in unison the words of Psalm cxiv, beginning "When Israel came out of Egypt." As soon as they had landed, the Angel, whose office was now completed, gave them a blessing, and departed over the waters as rapidly as he had come.

The newly-arrived spirits, deprived of their guide, stood on the shore, gazing in wonder at their surroundings, on which now shone the full light of the risen sun, and perplexed as to the direction which they were to take; and on perceiving the poets they pressed round them, and asked to be shown the way to the mountain. Virgil explained to them in reply that they were as much strangers to this region as themselves, and while he was

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doing so the spirits noticed that Dante was alive, and turned pale with wonder at the discovery; but for Dante too there was about to be a wonderful discovery. For as the spirits gazed at him with eager curiosity, one of them suddenly left his companions, and darting forward embraced him with all the delight of one who meets a dear friend unexpectedly after a long separation. Dante did not recognize him in his turn until the spirit spoke, when the sweet tones of his voice must have filled him with rapture, for he knew them as those of his dear friend Casella the musician, whom he had known and loved in his early days in Florence, when Casella used to set Dante's own love-songs to music, and often soothed and refreshed the weary soul of the poet by singing to him in that sweet voice which Dante now heard again. He asked his friend once more to give him the joy of his music, and great must his delight have been when Casella not only complied, but began one of those very

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love-songs of Dante's own writing. His sweet voice rang out in the clear morning air, and Virgil and the other spirits crowded round, drinking in every note and forgetting all else in the rapture of the music. But such joy was not to last, the spirits had great tasks to perform before they could give themselves up to pure enjoyment, and suddenly the stern voice of Cato was heard, reminding them of their duty. Then the song ceased, and the spirits dispersed like a flock of doves when frightened at a meal, and hurried in an eager, aimless way towards the mountain.

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CHAPTER XII

THE STORY OF KING MANFRED

"So wide arms
Hath goodness infinite, that it receives
All who turn to it."

Purgatory, canto iii.

DANTE and Virgil moved on toward the mountain after the crowd of spirits had been dispersed by the warning of Cato, and when they reached the base they paused, not knowing, says Dante, how that steep and rugged path before them could be ascended without the aid of wings. While they stood considering, a group of spirits approached them from the left, moving so slowly that they almost appeared stationary, and the poets advanced to meet them, thinking that they might be able to direct them. The spirits

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were startled at first to see any one moving in a contrary direction to themselves, as this was against the laws of Purgatory, but when Virgil asked them the way, the foremost advanced, and the others did the same, like a flock of sheep who follow their leader without knowing why. One of these spirits proved to be a man of great interest when on earth. His name was King Manfred, and he was the son of the Emperor Frederick II. He spent his youth amid the luxury of his father's court in Sicily, and was himself a poet, and one of the very first who wrote verses in the Italian language. He must have led a life of ease and enjoyment in that beautiful southern climate, surrounded by all that a young man of those days could desire; but on the death of his father everything was changed. Manfred, though the son of the Emperor, was not his heir, and on the death of Frederick, his enormous dominions, which included Germany as well as Sicily and Naples, were inherited by Manfred's half-

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brother Conrad. This young prince, who had been brought up in his father's German dominions, crossed the Alps and claimed the kingdom of Naples, but soon afterwards he died, leaving Manfred as the guardian of his infant son Conradin, who was to succeed him. So now Manfred's life of luxury and ease was changed to one of strife and warfare, and the courtier and poet of the Sicilian Court became the brave knight and warrior, and the head of a great party in Italy. He was given the title of King of the Sicilies (which meant the kingdom of Sicily and Naples), out of courtesy, as he only held them in trust for his little nephew, and never really reigned himself; but the rights of Conradin were ignored by the Pope, who invited Prince Charles of Anjou, the brother of the King of France, into Italy, and gave him the title which belonged by right to Conradin. Manfred immediately prepared for resistance, and in 1265, the year of Dante's birth, a great battle was fought between his troops and

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those of Charles, which resulted in a victory for the latter, and Manfred, the brave prince round whom so many hopes centred, was found dead on the field.

Charles was a very cruel and hard man, and an action of his which marked him as such, was that he refused an honourable tomb to his enemy. Manfred's body was hastily buried on the field of battle, and Charles probably thought that the spot would soon be forgotten and no monument erected to mark it. But even Charles's own followers were indignant at such disrespect to the memory of a prince, who, if an enemy, was the son of an emperor, and a brave knight and soldier, and they, as well as Manfred's own followers, threw stones on the spot until a high mound arose to mark it. Even after this, however, his enemies would not allow Manfred's body to remain in peace, for by the Pope's orders it was torn from its resting-place, with the ringing of bells and inverted torches, which belonged to the rite of

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excommunication. All these sad facts were referred to by Manfred himself in his conversation with Dante, and he shows us in it the contrast between the infinite mercy and goodness of God, and the animosity and hatred of those who should follow His example on earth.

You will perhaps like to hear what was the fate of the little boy monarch Conradin, for whom Manfred fought, before I leave this story. He must have been a very brave prince, for as soon as he was old enough he determined to claim his kingdom from the enemy who had defeated Manfred; he entered his Neapolitan territory, and was joyfully received by his people there, but the French soon met him in a great battle and were again victorious. Poor Conradin was taken prisoner, and after a pretence of a trial, Charles condemned him as a rebel and a traitor, and he was beheaded at the early age of seventeen. But Charles was not always victorious; another Pope began to rule, who

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was not at all friendly to him, and his power soon began to diminish. At last a terrible revolution, known as the Sicilian Vespers, put an end to his power in Italy, and soon afterwards he died.

When Dante met Manfred in Purgatory, as I was telling you, Manfred appeared to know who he was, though of course he could never have seen him on earth, because he died the year that Dante was born, and when he spoke to him, Dante turned and saw a fair, handsome man, with a noble demeanour, but disfigured by a cleft in one of his eyelids; but he did not know who he was until Manfred told him, and showed him another wound on his chest, and told Dante how he met with it on the battle-field of Benevento, where he had been slain. He asked Dante to take a message from him to his daughter Constance, who was married to King Peter III of Aragon, and to tell her that though he had committed many sins in his life, he had repented at the last, and owing to the great

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mercy of the Almighty had been forgiven, though still suffering for his delay in repentance by being obliged to wander for many years near the base of the mountain before being admitted to Purgatory itself. For though God's mercy is so great that it is never too late to turn to Him, Dante shows in this the difference between those who, like Manfred, only repented at the last, and those who worked out part of their repentance on earth.

Dante was so much interested in all that Manfred told him, that when the spirits stopped before an aperture in the rock before them, which they pointed out as his path, he was surprised to find, from the position of the sun, that two hours had elapsed while they had been talking.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE LAZY FLORENTINE

"Among them one
Who seemed to be much wearied, sat him down
And with his arms did fold his knees about,
Holding his face between them downward bent."
Purgatory, canto iv.

AFTER Dante and Virgil had scrambled up the rough path pointed out to them by Manfred and his companions, they saw the steep sides of the mountain itself rising sheer in front of them, but Dante was beginning to be exhausted with the effort of climbing, and it needed all Virgil's encouraging words to urge him forward, until they reached a level place like a broad terrace or ledge cut out in the side of the mountain, where they could pause awhile to rest. As they sat on the ledge

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looking towards the east, Dante asked Virgil to explain to him why the sun was on his left instead of his right as it would have been in Italy, and Virgil told him that this was because they were south of the sun's path. He also wanted to know how long the ascent of the mountain would take them, but this Virgil could not answer so explicitly; he told Dante, however, that the road would become easier the further they advanced until at last all difficulties would have vanished and his progress be as easy as floating down stream in a boat. It is thus that Dante wishes to show us that though the first steps in a penitential course are beset with difficulties, they gradually vanish and disappear as the right path is pursued. As Virgil finished speaking, Dante was startled by a voice near which chimed in with the words—"Perhaps you will need to sit down and rest before then," and turning in the direction from whence it came, Dante saw for the first time a rock, in the shade from which several

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spirits were lolling lazily. One of these was seated with his arms embracing his knees and his face bent down on them, and his whole appearance one of such utter laziness that Dante said to Virgil that he looked more indolent than if "Sloth were his own sister." The spirit overheard the derisive remark, and he retorted that if Dante had so much energy he had better show it by climbing, and as he spoke he looked up sideways at Dante, too lazy even to raise his head properly. As he did so Dante recognized him as Belacqua, a maker of musical instruments in Florence, whose laziness had always been a by-word among his associates. It is said of him that he used to go to his shop in a morning, and sit down and never rise from his chair, even when customers came in, except when he was going to his meals, or to the sleep which he always took in the afternoon. Dante, whose own active eager nature would have little in common with Belacqua's, is said to have taken him to task for his laziness. One day when

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he had been doing so Belacqua replied to him in the words of Aristotle—"By sitting down and resting, thy soul is rendered wise;" to which Dante retorted—"Certainly if one becomes wise by sitting down, none was ever so wise as thou." It is not related what reply Belacqua made to that, and in all probability he was much too lazy to make any at all! But though Dante could not have had much in common with Belacqua, the sight of a Florentine was always welcome to him, and Belacqua was associated in his mind with the happy days when he and his comrades wrote love-songs, which Casella set to music, and which were accompanied on the instruments which Belacqua used to supply, and for this reason he hurried forward to speak to him, in spite of the fatigue from his recent ascent, which still made him breathless, and in striking contrast to Belacqua, who lazily raised his head without moving his body. As he spoke to Dante, he asked him in a tone of mockery if he really understood at last what

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Virgil had been explaining to him, and Dante, who could hardly refrain from laughter at his lazy attitude, asked him in return whether it were his old habit of laziness which kept him outside the gate of Purgatory. Belacqua admitted that it was so, since it was laziness which caused him to put off repentance when on earth, and he now had to remain outside the gates for as many years as he had lived on earth. But it was already nearly noon, and though Dante would have liked to spend longer with his old Florentine acquaintance, Virgil had already gone forward towards the terrace above, from whence he called Dante to follow him. Dante began to do so, but paused after a few steps to listen to the remarks of some of the indolent whom he was leaving behind, and who were pointing out to his companion that Dante cast a shadow, and had therefore a material body. But Virgil reproved him sharply, telling him that he should not delay his upward path by stopping to listen to what others said about him.

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"Follow me," he said, "and let the people talk; stand firm as a tower, which never lets its summit be shaken by the blowing of the winds."

And Dante obeyed him without more delay, blushing with shame at his fault as he did so.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE VALLEY OF FLOWERS

"Refulgent gold, and silver thrice refined,
And scarlet grain and ceruse, Indian wood
Of lucid dye serene, fresh emeralds
But newly broken, by the herbs and flowers
Placed in that fair recess, in colour all
Had been surpass'd, as great surpasses less:
Nor Nature only there lavish'd her hues
But of the sweetness of a thousand smells
A rare and undistinguish'd fragrance made."

Purgatory, canto vii.

DANTE and Virgil continued to toil up the steep sides of the mountain until the day was drawing near its close, when they came upon a spirit standing alone in an attitude of calm dignity, like, so Dante says, that of a lion at rest. Virgil approached this spirit and asked him which was the best path for them to take; but the spirit replied by another

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question as to their country and condition. Virgil began to tell him, but no sooner had he named Mantua, his own birthplace, than the haughty manner of the spirit immediately gave way to one of eager delight and interest.

"Oh! Mantuan," he exclaimed, as he embraced him, "I am Sordello, from thy country."

But while Virgil and Sordello were filled with joy, Dante's own heart sank with sorrow at the thoughts of the contrast between their patriotism and the fierce discord which divided not only compatriots but members of the same families in the Italy of his own day.

After Sordello had embraced Virgil several times out of mere joy at meeting a brother Mantuan, he wished to know further particulars, and on hearing that it was the greatest of Latin poets whom he was greeting, he again embraced him, but this time in all humility clasping his knees instead of throwing his arms round his neck.

Sordello was himself a poet. He lived

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some years before Dante, and wrote in the two languages which were spoken in the southern part of France, and which some of the very early Italian poets used for their songs, so it was to him an especial joy, as it had been to Dante, to meet with so great a poet as Virgil.

Sordello then offered to lead the poets to a place where they could spend the night in safety, as it was not permitted to any one to climb the mountain between sunset and sunrise, and following him they came to a spot where they looked down on a most beautiful and interesting scene. Below them was a valley which must have been very much like those among the Alps in Switzerland or Italy, for it was covered with a carpet of grass and the most exquisite flowers. Dante does not tell us what these were, but he tells us that they formed a pattern of the most lovely colours, such as pure gold, bright deep crimson, dazzling white, clear indigo, rich brown, and fresh emerald green.

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In a high valley in Switzerland, soon after the winter snows have melted, I have seen the same colours from Alpine flowers, such as the great golden globe-flower or double buttercup, the beautiful little crimson primula, the great star-like anemone, the deep blue gentian, and the rich bronze-coloured hawksweed, which were growing in luxuriant profusion on the soft green grass.

From these flowers arose, too, a most lovely perfume, and amongst them were seated some spirits singing a sweet hymn from one of the services of the Church. All these spirits had been illustrious men when on earth, as this spot was reserved for great rulers and princes, and as the poets stood a little above the vale on a slight elevation, they were able to observe them and identify each as Sordello pointed them out. Amongst them was Rudolph of Hapsburg, who had been Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in Dante's youth, and whose neglect of Italy seemed to the poet partly the cause of his

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country's misfortunes. And near to him was Ottocar, King of Bohemia, who fought against Rudolph on earth, but now was giving him kindly encouragement in this vale of harmony and rest. Near to them were two kings, Philip III of France, known as Philip the Bold, and Henry the Fat, of Navarre. They were discoursing together earnestly and sadly about the sins and shortcomings of Philip le Bel, who was the son of Philip the Bold and son-in-law of the King of Navarre, and who was King of France at the time of Dante's exile. Another king was near to them, and this was Peter III of Aragon, the husband of King Manfred's daughter Constance, for whom you will remember Manfred gave a message to Dante. He is described as very stalwart in limb, and he was singing in unison with his great enemy when on earth, Charles of Anjou, the conqueror of Manfred and of the brave young Conradin. Peter's son and successor, Alphonse III, was seated behind him, and

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a little apart was a monarch spoken of as "The King of simple life, who was more fortunate in his successor than Peter III or Charles of Anjou were in theirs," and this monarch is no other than our own English king, Henry III, who died while Dante was a little boy.

The day had now passed on to the evening, and shades of twilight were beginning to gather. It was the hour, Dante remembered, when on earth the thoughts of travellers turn back with tender yearning to their home and the dear ones they have left behind, and when the sweet chimes of the *Angelus* bell seems to toll for the departing day. And now the hymn to which he had been listening from below ceased, and, to his wonder, one of the spirits rose, commanding attention by the gesture of his hand, then with a gaze of intent rapt devotion he began to sing an evening hymn with so much sweetness that Dante was lost in delight at the sound. The other spirits joined in, and when the

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SORDELLO EXPLAINED THAT THEY HAD COME TO GUARD IT FROM A SERPENT.

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hymn was over they all gazed upward in mute expectation. But Dante was not prepared for what followed. He too gazed towards the evening sky, and there he saw appear two angels who bore flaming swords with broken points in their hands, and had garments and wings of the tender lovely shade of green which we see in buds in the early spring. Their faces and hair were surrounded by so much radiance that it dazzled Dante's eyes to look at them for long, but he saw them take up their position at each end of the valley, and as they did so Sordello explained that they had come to guard it from a serpent which would presently enter it. Dante was filled with terror at this, and pressed close to Virgil for protection, as he did not know at which side the venomous reptile might at any moment approach, but his thoughts were diverted by Sordello, who now requested that he and Virgil should descend into the valley and converse with the spirits who were assembled

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there. Dante gladly complied, and had hardly taken three steps, when he was struck by the expression of a spirit who stood gazing at him as if he knew him, and as they approached each other nearer Dante recognized Nino of Gallura, a Judge of Sardinia, and grandson, through his mother, of Count Ugolino, who died the cruel death in the Tower of Hunger. His pleasure at meeting Dante was very great, and very affectionate greetings passed between them, and when Nino discovered that Dante was still alive and would return to earth, he was still more pleased, because he had a little girl named Giovanna, whom he loved very dearly, and he was able to send a message to her by Dante. By the time he and Dante had had this conversation the sun had set, and the stars were again shining in the sky; but while he was gazing at them, the serpent, against whom the angels were guarding the valley, came slowly near, creeping among the grass and beautiful flowers, and from time

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to time raising its head as if about to strike. Sordello drew Dante's attention to it, and Dante was filled with horror, forgetting, for the moment, perhaps, that the guardian angels were near. But suddenly there was a sound of rushing wings in the air, and, at this sign that the angels were descending from their post above the valley, the serpent hurried away, and, when he had gone, the angels returned to their former positions. After this Dante could feel quite safe in the valley, for even if evil things drew near he knew that God's angels were there to protect him.

He was weary now, for he had been travelling for three days and two nights, and had gone through great toil and fatigue, as we know, so he and the other two poets, with the father of the little Giovanna, and another spirit, named Conrad, lay down on the soft grass and fragrant flowers, and there, with the bright stars looking down on him, and the radiant forms of the angels guarding the valley with drawn swords, Dante fell into a deep sleep.

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CHAPTER XV

THE GATE AND THE ANGEL

"I could descry
A portal, and three steps beneath, that led
For inlet there of different colour each . . .
Piously at his holy feet devolved
I cast me, praying him for pity's sake
That he would open to me."

Purgatory, canto ix.

DANTE slept deeply all night in the Valley of Flowers, and in the early hours of the morning, when nature begins to bestir herself and the first faint twitter of birds is to be heard, he dreamt a strange dream. He thought in it that he lay on Mount Ida, a celebrated mountain in Greece, and that above him appeared a wonderful eagle with gold plumage, and as he watched the bird, he thought that it suddenly swooped down upon

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him and carried him right up into a distant region of the sky where the light seemed to be so intense that it woke Dante, and he found that he was no longer in the Vale, but on the mountain-side looking down on the sea far below. At this discovery Dante at first turned pale and cold with fear, but Virgil was by his side, and told him to fear nothing, and pointed out in the rock before them the Gate of Purgatory itself. He then explained to Dante that whilst he was asleep in the Valley of Flowers a lady from Heaven, named Lucia (symbolical of heavenly grace), had come to him when day broke and had borne him in her arms to this present resting-place, and that it was this which had caused his strange dream. Virgil himself had followed her, leaving Sordello, Nino, and Conrad behind, asleep, and Dante had awoke at the moment when Lucia left him. So now Dante had reached the point where he would enter Purgatory itself, and as he and Virgil approached the gate in the rock, they found

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that there were three steps leading up to it. The bottom one was of pure white marble, and represented Sincerity ; the next one was a deep dull sort of purple, and cracked across, and represented Contrition, or sorrow for past misdeeds ; and the third and last was of blood-red porphyry, and represented Expiation of sin by good deeds. Thus the steps showed that without sincerity, repentance, and a good life, God's kingdom cannot be entered by the penitent soul.

Above these steps, at the gate, sat an angel, clad in an ash-coloured robe, and holding a naked sword in his hand. His face was shining with a wonderful light, which the sword reflected so brilliantly that Dante's eyes were too much dazzled to look at him. This doorkeeper did not think at first that Virgil and Dante ought to have come there, because the other spirits were guided by an angel when they arrived, and they had none with them. He was silent at first, and when he spoke to them it was in severe accents, and he

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ABOVE THESE STEPS, AT THE GATE, SAT AN ANGEL, CLAD IN AN ASH-COLOURED ROBE, AND HOLDING A NAKED SWORD IN HIS HAND.

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told them to speak from where they stood, and tell him what they wanted, and where their guide was; but as soon as Virgil explained that Lucia had pointed out the entrance to them, the angel's manner quite changed, and he spoke very kindly to them, and told them to come forward. Virgil went first up those wonderful steps and Dante followed, and at the top of the flight Virgil told Dante to ask for admission; so Dante bent on his knees before the doorkeeper three times, entreating him to open the gate for him. Before doing so the angel took his sword and marked the letter *P* (which stands for *Peccate*, the Italian word for sin) seven times on his forehead, to represent the seven deadly sins from which souls were purified within, and bade him to be cleansed from them. He then took two keys, one of silver and one of gold, from beneath his robe, and unlocking the gate, bade the poets enter, but having done so, to go forward, and not look behind, as, if they did so, they would have to return.

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Two sounds fell on Dante's ear as they passed through the door; the first was the harsh grating sound as it swung to behind them, but mingled with it came a sweeter sound, and Dante already heard the voices of the penitents in the notes of the *Te Deum* hymn, which sounded as if it were being sung to an organ accompaniment, the words sometimes being audible and sometimes not.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE SCULPTURE ON THE ROCK

"I discovered that the bank, around,
Whose proud uprising all ascent denied,
Was marble white, and so exactly wrought
With quaintest sculpture, that not alone
Had Polycletus, but e'en nature's self
Been shamed."

Purgatory, canto x.

AFTER the gate of Purgatory had closed behind them Dante and Virgil climbed up a rocky incline, so uneven that it reminded Dante of the waves on the sea-shore, and then reached a broad ledge cut out in the side of the mountain. This was the first of the seven ledges which encircled the mountain, one above the other, and in each of which penance was done for a different form of sin. It was about eighteen feet broad, and

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above it rose a white marble cliff on which was a sight that filled Dante with admiration and wonder, for this cliff, instead of being bare as the cliffs lower down had been, was ornamented with carvings so beautiful, that they surpassed the work of the most famous earthly sculptors. For some time Dante was quite absorbed in studying these wonderful designs. The first he saw represented the Angel of the Annunciation telling the Virgin Mary that she should be the Mother of Christ. The Angel seemed so life-like that Dante almost thought he heard the word "Hail!" which he was saying to Mary, who was seen in an attitude of humble awe as she heard the wonderful greeting. Dante was so much absorbed in this representation that Virgil had to remind him that there were others to be seen, and moving towards the left he saw the Ark being removed from the Tabernacle to Jerusalem, preceded by a multitude whose singing Dante almost thought to hear, so realistically were the

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singers represented ; they were being led by King David, who danced before the Lord as we read of him doing in the Bible, and who seemed to Dante even more than usually kingly while engaged in this act of humility. The next design illustrated a scene, not from the Bible, but from Roman History. The story runs, that one day when the Emperor Trajan was riding out surrounded by his soldiers a poor woman seized his bridle and asked him with many tears to avenge the murder of her son. The Emperor was a great and just man, and he was so much troubled by the poor woman's distress that he made inquiries about the murderer, and great must his dismay have been to find that it was his own son who had done the wicked deed. According to the story Trajan, then, as the only amends in his power, offered his son to the poor woman to take care of her and comfort her in the place of the one she had lost, and it is said that she consented to this strange arrangement. The scene which Dante saw

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on the marble cliff, represented the Emperor, surrounded by all the pomp of his position, stooping down to attend to the entreaties of the widow, who stood tearful and agitated at his horse's bridle.

After having examined this last sculpture, Dante's attention was attracted from the carvings by some spirits who were seen approaching very slowly on account of the heavy stones which they carried on their shoulders, and the weight from which caused them great suffering, and bent them down until it was difficult to see that they were people at all. As they came nearer, Dante heard them repeating the words of the Lord's Prayer, but it was for the sake of the people still struggling on earth that they prayed, for the petitions of the Lord's Prayer were no longer needed for themselves.

The sin for which their spirits were being punished was that of pride, and it was because they had thought themselves higher and better than other people when on earth that

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they were bent nearly to the ground, to teach them lowliness and humility now. But though they were suffering very much, these spirits were very different from those in hell, for through all they recognized that it was for their good, and were resigned to God's will, since they knew that by their punishment He was curing them for ever of the sin which they had now learnt to hate. As they drew nearer, Virgil asked these spirits the best way for them to ascend the mountain, and one of them replied that if they moved on with them towards the right they would come to a pass possible for them to climb. This spirit also said that he wished he could see whom he was addressing, but it was impossible for him to raise his head because of the weight on his neck. He told them that he himself was Omberto, a Tuscan, and that his pride and arrogance was so great, when he was on earth, that his countrymen hated him, and at last murdered him. Dante, who was walking by the side of the spirit,

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bent his head as he listened; he may have been touched by what the spirit had said about not being able to see him, or it may have been that shame made him do so, for he knew pride to be his own besetting sin, and so stooped to bring his face nearer to the same level. Omberto does not seem to have recognized Dante, though another spirit near did so; this was an artist named Oderisi, who was famed as an illuminator when on earth, and with whom Dante was personally acquainted. Perhaps you may have seen in museums copies of very old books which were made before printing was invented, and have noticed how beautifully the pages are ornamented. Some have lovely floral designs all round the written words, and others scrolls, and others again in addition to these designs have most beautiful little pictures of saints and angels. The colours in these old MSS. are so brilliant that one can hardly believe they were put on hundreds of years ago. The gold leaf, and the bright reds and blue

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are fresher and purer than the colours in many pictures of to-day. The work too is all most exquisitely fine, and must have taken the best years and the best labour of the artist who did it. This is the art known as illuminating, and it was this that had been Oderisi's. Dante had doubtless seen some of his work and admired it very much, and Oderisi had been very proud of it on earth, but now was learning the lesson of humility, and was eager to tell Dante that another artist whom he named had greater merit, and could do better work than his had been. And this led him to point out of how little value earthly fame is, and how even a man really great in his own branch of art is soon surpassed by another; and he alluded to two poets who both had the name of Guido, one being probably Dante's own friend Guido Cavalcanti, and the other a poet named Guido Guinicelli, whose writings had a great influence on Dante, and reminded him how one had taken the place of the other and eclipsed his fame; and he also

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alluded to a great artist named Cimabue, who had been surpassed by his pupil Giotto, but this is so interesting a story that I must give it a chapter to itself when I have finished telling you about the wonderful pictures on the rock. Soon Dante came to some more of these as beautiful as the others, but instead of being on the rock above him, they were on the pavement where he trod. You will perhaps have noticed that the other designs all represented the virtues of humility. There was Mary the humble maiden, and David the King humbling himself before God, and Trajan the Emperor stooping to the poor widow. But these other pictures represented the corresponding sin of pride, and its punishment. There was the fall of Lucifer or Satan, who was thrust out of heaven for aspiring to be equal with God, and there was Nimrod standing dejected at the foot of the Tower which he intended should reach to heaven; and then came a very pathetic picture, that of Niobe in her anguish, when, for the sin of

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pride and boasting, her seven sons and seven daughters were killed before her by a thunderbolt from heaven. The legend, which you may read in Greek mythology, runs that she afterwards wept so much for her loss that she was turned into stone; but what Dante saw depicted here, was the moment when the thunderbolt fell and killed her children before her horror-struck eyes. In the Uffizi, a great art gallery in Florence, I have seen a group of sculpture representing the scene which Dante describes here. The sons and daughters are in various attitudes of horror as they see the thunderbolts approach, and one little child, a girl, the youngest of all, has run to her mother and is clasping her with her arms, hiding her face against her knees. Niobe herself stands with eyes of agonized despair, trying in vain to protect her little daughter from the fate she sees approaching. As one reads of the group Dante saw, one would almost think that he was describing

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this one in the Uffizi; but that we know to be impossible, because at Dante's time these wonderful figures were hidden away under the dust of centuries in Greece, and it was not until many years later that they were discovered and taken to Florence.

On that wonderful floor Dante also saw King Saul falling dead on his sword after he had been defeated in the great battle on Mount Gilboa, and the proud city of Troy reduced to ashes through the stratagem of the wooden horse, and the great king Cyrus being defeated by Queen Tomyris, and many more instances of pride being punished; and the more he saw the more he was struck with wonder and awe at the art which had produced these masterpieces.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE BOY ARTIST

"Cimabue thought
To lord it over painting's field; and now
The cry is Giotto's."

Purgatory, canto xi.

IN the last chapter I told you I would give you the story of the artist whose fame surpassed that of his master. There is a special reason for doing so, for he happens to be interesting, not only as a great artist, but also as a personal friend of Dante's own.

In a small village called Vespignano, about fourteen miles from Florence, lived some peasants whose name was Bordone, and to them in 1276—the year when Dante was a boy of eleven, and had met Beatrice two

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years before—there was born a little son. The child was christened Giotto (pronounced Jotto), and it is by this name he is best known.

The little Giotto had a boyhood very different from that of Dante. Instead of spending it in a town as Dante did, he lived far away in the country, and, instead of being taught all the learning of the day, he did not go to school at all. But though his lot was cast far away from the world of men and of books, the little Giotto learnt from a teacher who was to stand him in even better stead than these. Nature herself was his instructor, and from her he learnt his lesson well. He studied the beautiful mountains and the shape of the trees and flowers and leaves around him, and he watched the sheep and goats on the hillside, until he knew how they stood and how they moved, and every detail of their forms. Very soon he did more than observe these things; he began to try and reproduce them himself. He had no draw-

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ing materials—not even a pencil or a bit of paper—and probably had never seen any in his life; but he took the most pointed stone that he could find, probably a flint, and with this he scratched the lines he wanted to make on a smooth piece of rock. His parents, as I have told you, were quite poor people, so at a very early age Giotto had to begin work, and was sent out on to the hillside to watch over some sheep. It must have been just what he would most love to do; and we can picture the little Italian with his shabby clothes, and bare feet, lying face downward on the soft grass, with his rough drawing-board in front of him, and the gentle sheep nibbling near him. Around him rose the peaks of the mountains, and overhead would stretch the clear soft Italian sky. What dreams he must have had as he lay there, and how the hours must have sped as he tried to draw the sheep, or goats, or the faithful watch-dog who guarded them! But one day a great and unexpected event occurred, which

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quite changed the current of his life, and took him away from the hills and meadows into the great town where Dante was already a young man, and where they afterwards met and became friends. There was in Florence at this time an artist named Cimabue (pronounced Chimabooay), who had so much talent, and had so improved the art of his day, that he has been called the Father of Italian Painting. One of his pictures, when carried to its place in a church of Florence, from his studio near by, filled the people with so much joy, that the road from his studio to the church has been called the Joyful Road to this day. This great painter went one day to the village where Giotto lived, for what purpose we do not know, and there on the hillside he came upon the boy himself busily drawing his sheep on the piece of rock. Cimabue was struck by the occupation of the little shepherd, and he paused to look at his work, and when he had seen it, he was so much pleased with the talent shown

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that he determined that the peasant boy should be trained as an artist. So he obtained permission from Giotto's parents to take him back with him to Florence, and to teach him in his own studio. Giotto made great progress there under his kind master, and he learnt not only to be a painter, but to be an architect and sculptor as well. His talent soon became recognized, and in 1295, when he was only nineteen, a second great event happened, and changed the course of his life again.

The Pope, Bonifacio VIII, wished to have some frescoes (pictures painted on the plaistered walls) painted in S. Peter's, the great Cathedral of Rome, and he wanted them to be painted by the most talented artist in Italy. So he sent a messenger to visit the greatest artists, and bring back proof of their power, so that he might choose the best. When the messenger came to Giotto, instead of drawing a picture or an elaborate design, he took some red colour in his brush,

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and with one sweep of his hand drew a circle so perfect that the O of Giotto has become a proverb in Italy, and is spoken of to this day. When the Pope saw it he was quite convinced of Giotto's wonderful talent, so he sent for him to do the work. Giotto was seven years in Rome, and then he returned to Florence, and painted a great many frescoes there. By this time he must have known Dante, for there is a portrait of the poet as a young man with Brunetto Latini and other well-known Florentines, painted by Giotto on the wall of a room in one of the public buildings of Florence. Giotto's fame now extended all over Italy, and he was sent for to many different parts to paint frescoes. During Dante's exile they met more than once; and it is said that Dante suggested the subject of some of his best paintings to him. The last years of his life were spent in Florence again, and devoted to the wonderful piece of work, by which he is, perhaps, better remembered than by his

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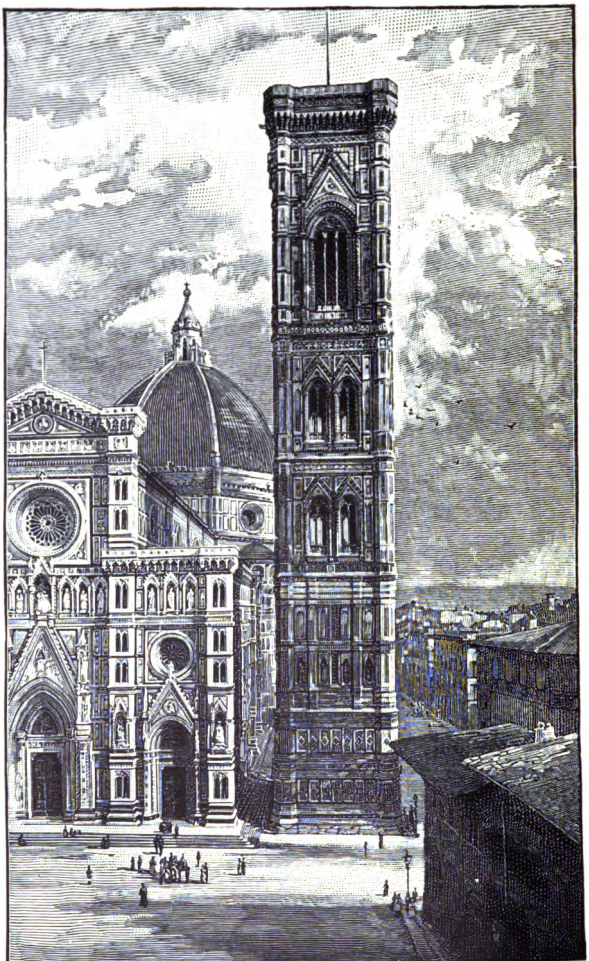

GIOTTO'S TOWER, FLORENCE.

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paintings. The cathedral, which is one of the glories of Florence, had been built about this time, and was now nearly completed, but it still wanted a belfry or bell-tower, which in those days was usually a separate structure standing near the west end of the cathedral. It was this that Giotto designed, and the result was a tower of such exquisite beauty that if it were his only work he would be always remembered for it with reverence and gratitude. It is known as Giotto's Tower, or sometimes as the Lily Tower of Florence, and is built of the most dazzling marbles, ornamented with delicate carvings and exquisite bas-reliefs. Round the base is a series of designs illustrating the education of man from the Creation to Giotto's own day. In them he is shown as a shepherd, as the first founder of iron, as the first musician, and so on; and once more as we look we are carried back to the humble home of Giotto's childhood, for there in one of the bas-reliefs is a group of sheep, such as

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he had tried to draw on the hillside, and watching them a puppy, with a life-like expression on its tiny face.

Not far from where this dazzling fabric stands out against the clear Italian sky, is a spot where Dante used to love to sit and muse on a summer's evening, and on the piece of stone which is said to have been his seat, the Florentines have inscribed the words—*Sasso di Dante* (Dante's stone).

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE BLIND SPIRITS

"Throughout the orbs of all
A thread of wire, impiercing knits them up
As for the taming of a haggard hawk."
Purgatory, canto xiii.

WE left Dante lost in admiration of the wonderful sculptures on the pavement. He was so absorbed in them that it was not until Virgil drew his attention to it that he saw an angel, who was approaching them on the mountain-side. This angel was clad in pure white, and must have been very beautiful to look upon, for his face shone with a tremulous light, like that of the morning star. He bade the poet advance towards him, for the steps leading to the next circle, or ledge, were near, and as Dante

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passed him he felt his wings brush his forehead, but it was not until later that he discovered what happened when they did so. As the poet climbed the steep steps to the next circle they heard voices singing "Blessed are the poor in spirit" with much sweetness. Dante was conscious of a wonderful sense of lightness and absence of fatigue as he made this ascent, and now it was that Virgil explained to him that when the angel's wing touched his forehead the first of the seven P's had been wiped away from it, and Dante, raising his hand to his forehead, found that this was indeed so, and that only six P's remained, and so knew that already his burden of sin had grown less.

The second circle which they now entered was where those guilty of Envy are punished, but Virgil had walked on it for about a mile before they saw any of the spirits who inhabited it. As they did so, they were startled by voices from invisible beings giving instances of the corresponding virtue

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to the sin punished. The first one cried, "They have no wine," words from the gospel story of the miracle of Cana in Galilee, where Jesus turned the water into wine, as an example of kindness and consideration for others. This was followed by one saying, "I am Orestes," as a reminder of the pathetic story of the two friends Pylades and Orestes. Orestes was a prince of Greece, and when a little boy there was a wicked plot to murder him, but he was saved by the efforts of his sister Electra, and taken to the house of his uncle Strophius, the king of a neighbouring state. His uncle was very kind to him, and had him educated with his own son Pylades, and between the two boys there grew a friendship, which became stronger and stronger as the years went on. After they came to manhood an opportunity occurred for them to prove their friendship. Orestes and Pylades were both discovered in the act of trying to carry off an image of Diana from a neighbouring country, and the king of the

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country condemned Orestes to death while allowing Pylades to go free, but as he did not know which of the two was Orestes and which Pylades, they each claimed to be Orestes, so as to save the other. Thus the spirits were constantly reminded of this beautiful instance of self-sacrificing love in contrast to their own ignoble and selfish sin. Dante did not recognize the spirits in the region until Virgil pointed them out, for they were sitting huddled up together near the rock, and clad in cloaks of the same colour, so it was difficult at first to see them; but as they drew nearer he heard their voices raised in prayer, and perceived how sadly they were suffering, as their eyes were run through by a wire, so that no light could reach them. When Dante discovered this, and knew that though he could see them they could not see him, he felt that it would be wanting in delicacy to look at them much, but Virgil told him he might speak to them briefly. One of them told him that she was Sapia,

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and that she came from Sienna, so had lived not far from Dante's own home, and two others were also fellow-countrymen of Dante's. As the poets left these spirits, Dante was startled by a sound like a clap of thunder, from which he distinguished the words of Cain, "Whoever finds me will slay me," and Virgil explained that this was a warning to the spirits, by reminding them of the dreadful result of their sin in the case of Cain, in the same way as the voices in the air at the entrance had been examples for them. It was now evening, and the sun's rays were on a level with the poet's eye, when they were met by a sudden increase of brightness which quite dazzled them. This proved to be another angelic messenger of even greater beauty than the last, and his sweet voice invited them to ascend by a path less steep than those they have already trod, and as they did so, voices behind softly chanted the words, "Blessed are the merciful," and "Rejoice thou that conquerest."

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As they walked on towards the third circle, Virgil told Dante about the sin they had just seen punished, and pointed out how much better it is to love those things the joy of which is increased to us by sharing them with others, than to be like the Envious, who lose some of their pleasure as soon as the object of their affection has to be shared. He showed Dante how Love is the great and beautiful law which we ought all to obey, for love kindles love, so that if we love others they must catch some reflection of that love, and the whole world becomes better and more blessed for it.

Soon after this a curious drowsiness came over Dante, and though he still continued to walk he had a kind of vision. First he seemed to be in the Temple at the time when Jesus disputed with the learned men there, and he seemed to see the Virgin Mary when she found Him after she and Joseph had sought Him, and to hear her gentle voice saying, "Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing;"

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and afterwards he saw the young martyr Stephen raising his eyes to heaven, and asking forgiveness for the angry multitude who were stoning him to death. Virgil roused Dante from these visions, and urged him onward, and soon they found themselves enveloped in a fog, so dense that they could hardly see or breathe, and this was Circle IV, where the Angry were punished.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE TREMBLING MOUNTAIN

"When I did feel, as nodding to its fall,
The mountain tremble."

Purgatory, canto xx.

IN spite of the thick gloom of this Circle the spirits in it were singing hymns, and praying for peace and mercy, for in their suffering they were resigned to the will of God, and knew that it was for their good, and would cure them from the sins without which no true happiness could await them. Amongst them Dante met a Venetian named Mark, who had been a friend of his on earth, and they had some conversation about the evil condition of things in Italy, where the Pope and Emperor, instead of ruling wisely

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and well, were always fighting together for more power. As they talked, the two friends walked together, and when they came near the edge of the fog, and glimpses of daylight could be seen, Mark could go no further, because his punishment compelled him to remain in the fog, so with a hurried "God be with you!" to Dante, he plunged back in the gloom, while Dante went forward towards the light. It seemed very dazzling at first after the thick darkness, although the sun was beginning to set behind the mountain, and evening was again coming on. As they walked on Dante again fell into a half-sleeping state, and saw in a vision warnings against the sin of anger; but this time he was awakened by a sudden light flashing on his eyes while the sweet accents of an angel's voice again bade him mount; and as they did so Dante again felt his forehead gently fanned, and with the words, "Blessed are the peacemakers," one more of the letters was wiped from it. Twilight

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had come again, and overhead the stars were to be seen once more, and as the poets reached the summit of the steep incline, Dante's powers of walking suddenly forsook him, as a sign that he must pause until the darkness should be over, so he and Virgil remained stationary, "like ships which have reached the shore," at the entrance to Circle IV. While they rested here Virgil explained many things to Dante about the sins punished in Purgatory, showing him how Love, which is the noblest feeling of man when of a right kind, is the cause when perverted of many sins—such as Pride, which in its own wish to excel, loves the failure of others, or Envy, or Anger, which takes a revengeful delight in the evil of others. While the poets talked, the hour of midnight came near, and now Dante saw the light of the stars pale before that of the almost full moon, which shone like a great metal disk in the sky above, appearing wonderfully brilliant from the height which the poets had now gained. As they ceased talking,

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drowsiness began to steal over Dante, but he was roused from a half-dreamy state into which he fell by a crowd of spirits who came rushing along the side of the mountain with an eager haste, calling out as they did so, "Haste, haste; let not time be lost through lack of love;" and these were the slothful, people who on earth lost all their opportunities for doing good by want of zeal and energy, and who were now expiating their sins by practising its opposite virtue. As they hurried past Dante, he heard them call out examples and warnings to spur each other on. One spoke of the haste with which the Virgin Mary went to meet her cousin Elizabeth, the mother of S. John the Baptist; and another referred to the Israelites, who wasted so many years wandering in the Wilderness, that none of those who started to enter the Promised Land ever lived to reach it. Another again referred to the heroes of Virgil's poem, and reminded his companions how those comrades of Æneas,

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who, lacking the courage to endure with him to the end of his long adventures, remained behind in safety in Sicily, missed all the glory of the enterprise. All these things were uttered by the spirits as they hurried past fired with the eagerness they had lacked on earth; and when the last of them had passed and quiet once more reigned around, drowsiness again overcame Dante, and his thoughts became more and more mingled and confused, and at last he slept soundly. When he awoke it was once more broad daylight, and time for the journey to be continued; and leaving Circle IV, he and Virgil came to the ascent which led to the one above, where an angel again appeared to guide them. He directed them on their way with sweetest tones, and with an upward movement of his wings, and he also wiped one more of the letters from Dante's brow.

At the entrance to each Circle, as you may have noticed, one of the Beatitudes greets the poet's ear; and now as the angel fanned his

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brow with his beautiful wing, Dante heard him say, "Blessed are they who mourn," and soon he saw the application of these words, for when he and Virgil emerged from the narrow opening between the rocks by which they climbed to the Circle above, they saw a number of spirits lying with their faces bent to the ground, weeping and sighing as they repeated the words of the Psalm, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust." These were the Avaricious, and Dante had some conversation with two of them, one of whom proved to be Hugh Capet, the father of the French King of that name, who deplored not only his own sin, but that of many of his descendants. And now as the poets left this Circle a wonderful and strange thing happened which was not explained to Dante until afterwards, for suddenly he felt the whole mountain shake as with an earthquake, and at the same time all the spirits on the mountain raised a shout of "Glory to God in the Highest." Dante longed intensely to

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know the cause of this, but for once Virgil did not seem able to explain. But another strange thing was also soon to befall them, for as they walked on, a voice from behind greeted them with the words, "My brothers, may God give you peace," and a spirit joined them from behind, and continued to walk by their side. As he did so Virgil asked him if he could explain the cause of the earthquake; and much to the joy of Dante, who was still full of eager curiosity about it, the spirit explained to them how he himself had been the cause. For he told them, that whenever a spirit was freed from its sins, and the time had come for it to enter Heaven, an impulse seized it to ascend, and so leave the Circle where it was placed. And when this happened the whole mountain trembled, and at this sign all the other spirits broke into a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, as they had heard. And it was he himself, who, after five hundred years spent in penance on the mountain, had just been freed, and on whose

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account the earthquake had happened. Dante was fully satisfied now, and indeed the explanation of what had happened was very beautiful. And one of the most beautiful things about it was that it showed how far the spirits were being led from their sins of envy or other forms of selfishness when they could so rejoice at another's deliverance.

But now that the mystery of the earthquake was explained, Virgil asked the spirit to tell them who he himself was, and what was the special sin for which he had been suffering, and in reply, the spirit told them a good deal about himself. His name was Statius, and he was a Latin poet in the days when the Emperor Titus reigned at Rome; and so successful had he been in his art that he had received the laurel crown at the Capitol, which was the highest honour that could be conferred on a poet. He sang about the famous siege of Thebes and about Achilles the Greek hero who fought in the siege of Troy; and from telling the poets

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this, he was led to speak of Virgil, little thinking he was actually addressing him. He described in enthusiastic language how his poetry had influenced him, and how greatly he had admired his genius, and how much he would have given to have lived at the same time as he did. As Dante listened to all this praise of his beloved master, a longing seized him, as we can well imagine it would, to tell Statius who his companion really was, and he would have done so had not Virgil given him an intent look which bade him be silent. But though this checked Dante's words, it had not time to check the smile which rose to his lips, and Statius saw this, and begged him to tell him what amused him. Now poor Dante was in much perplexity with Virgil on one side binding him to silence, and Statius on the other urging him to speak; but on hearing Dante sigh with perplexity Virgil came to his relief, and gave him leave to answer Statius. So Dante, overflowing with delight

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at the thought of the joy his words would bring to Statius, told him the truth. "This is that Virgil," he cried, "from whom you drew inspiration to sing of gods and men."

So there on the mountain-side Statius had the great longing of his life on earth fulfilled, and, overcome with admiration and love, threw himself at the feet of Virgil. The three poets then walked on together to the next Circle, Dante listening while the other two conversed. Statius must have filled Virgil's heart with joy by his expressions of love and admiration; and now Virgil in his turn told Statius that he too had learnt to love him, though he had only known him by reputation before. But a still greater joy was reserved for Virgil, for Statius now went on to tell them that it was not only his poetry that had been influenced by him, but that it was through him also that he became a Christian; and he compared Virgil to one who, though walking in darkness himself, carried a light behind him, which led others

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to the truth. He said that he had been struck by a passage in Virgil's writings which so agreed with the teaching of Christianity that he was led to listen to it, and by this was led to believe and to be secretly baptized, though he continued to appear as a pagan for some time after—for which want of courage and faith he had since suffered punishment on the mountain.

I like to dwell on this meeting of the poets, because I think it must have been one of the happiest moments that Virgil ever had when he knew how much his influence had helped another, even though he had never seen him. Perhaps Dante wanted us to learn from it how unconscious the strongest influence may be, and that we may never know what the effect of our lives and character may be on another. By not caring for what is good, nor trying to lead a good life ourselves, we may be doing a harm of which we never dream ; and in the same way by living up to the best that is in us, we may

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help and comfort others without ever knowing that this is so.

In Circle VI, to which the poets next came, they saw a tree something like a pine in form, but bearing sweet-smelling fruit, and near to this was a waterfall, which fell over the rock and watered the leaves. Here the gluttons were punished, for though continually suffering the pangs of hunger and thirst, the tempting fruit and refreshing water were just out of their reach. The poets saw a crowd of them worn so thin by their constant incessant longing, that their eyes were quite sunken in their pale miserable faces. One of these recognized Dante, but he was so wasted and altered himself that Dante only knew him by his voice as Forese Donati, the brother of Corso, who stirred up so much discord in Florence, and of Dante's own wife, Gemma. Dante and Forese had been friends in Florence, and they now found much to talk about as they walked on side by side. Among other things Forese prophesied the

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death of his brother, telling Dante how he would be thrown from his horse when pursued by the populace, and thus killed. They parted at last, with mutual regret; and Dante saw another tree surrounded by spirits, and as he looked at them—pressing eagerly round and gazing up at its fruits—he was reminded of the way children may be seen to press round an older person, who holds some fruit or toy which they long to possess, just out of reach. So we think Dante himself may have played with his own children, with little James and Peter and Beatrice and the others in his own house in Florence, before the evil day befell when he left his native town for ever.

After this the poets moved on in silence until Dante was startled by a voice addressing them, and on raising his eyes towards it he perceived an angel even brighter than any of the others he had seen, and the radiance from which dazzled him so much that he turned round and walked with his back towards it

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to protect his eyes. As he did so he became conscious of a breeze like that of an early May morning filled with the sweet scents of countless flowers, and at the same time he heard the words, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness," and with this reminder of a hunger and thirst so different from those, too free indulgence in which he has just seen punished, Dante felt the sixth letter wiped from his forehead.

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CHAPTER XX

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

"Through that celestial forest, whose thick shade
With lively greenness the new-springing day
Attempered, eager now to roam and search
Its limits round, forthwith I left the bank
Along the champain leisurely my way
Pursuing o'er the ground, that on all sides
Delicious odour breathed."

Purgatory, canto xxviii.

DANTE had now nearly reached the summit of the mountain, but there was a difficult and painful experience for him to pass through yet. Circle VII was composed of a fierce fire, and through this he as well as his companions were obliged to pass. The heat was so intense as they drew near, that Dante's courage for once failed, and he paused at the edge not able to bring himself to the point of

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entering. Virgil tried to encourage him with comforting words; but nothing had any effect until he reminded Dante that the fire was a wall of separation between him and Beatrice, and that he could not hope to see her unless he passed through it. This had the result which Virgil expected, and as Dante plunged into the flames he said to him, "Well, are we going to remain on this side?" giving him at the same time an amused smile such as one gives to a child who is conquered by the promise of an apple. The fire was so fierce that Dante tells us molten glass would have been cool in comparison; but he was able to pass through it without any evil effect, and on reaching the other side an angel once more greeted and guided them. But the poets had not gone far up the steep steps which were still to be climbed, when it was necessary to pause, because the sun had set, so they each lay down on one of the steps, Dante between the other two, who watched him while he rested like shepherds watching their flocks.

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Lying there with his face turned towards the little patch of sky which was all that could be seen between the high rocks, and where the stars seemed brighter and clearer than he had ever seen them before, to the poet who was now drawing nearer to them, Dante fell into a sweet sleep. He dreamt while he slept that he saw Leah, the wife of Jacob, as a young and lovely woman, gathering flowers in a meadow, and that she told him in sweet tones that an active life was the most pleasing to her, while that of contemplation was so to her sister Rachel. At the approach of dawn Dante awoke from this refreshing sleep, to find "the great master," as he calls Virgil, and Statius already risen, and when Virgil reminded him that that day he should taste the reward of his toilsome journey and see Beatrice, he hurried up the rest of the steep ascent as if he had had wings. At the top he saw before him the Earthly Paradise or Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve lived before they were tempted into sin, and

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here Virgil told him that he must no longer look to him for help and guidance. Now that he had learnt his great lesson and had been cleansed from the seven sins which were purified in Purgatory, he was fit to rule himself, and Virgil's aid was no more needed. So now Virgil followed Dante instead of leading him as he had done before, until he parted from him entirely. It was a most lovely scene on which Dante now entered. Beautiful walks wound in and out under the shadow of graceful trees, a soft breeze filled with the odour of many flowers fanned his cheek, and the air was filled with the happy songs of birds. All these delights of woodland scenery which we noticed to be so wanting in the Dark Wood of the Inferno, are especially mentioned as being present here. After going some distance, Dante's progress was stopped by a stream of wonderfully clear water, and as he stood on the bank gazing at the flowers, trees, and shrubs on the other side, he saw a beautiful lady walking among them, singing

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as she walked, and picking the sweet blossoms which grew on her path. This lady was named Matilda. She here represents the active life of good works which is the outcome of a holy mind, and probably Dante took her name from that of a famous Countess Matilda who lived in the twelfth century, and who led a very active life, and did much for the cause of the Church and of religion.

Dante addressed her across the stream, and begged her to come nearer so that he might better hear her song, and Matilda did as he asked, moving with the most graceful steps across the grass and flowers, singing to him words from Psalm xcii, and weaving together the beautiful coloured blossoms she held the while. After she had finished her song, Matilda answered many questions which had puzzled Dante, and among them she explained that the stream on the banks of which they were standing divided into two further on, and that it had a wonderful power. The part of it which flowed to the left was called Lethe,

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and blotted out all memory of deeds committed; and the other, which was called Eunoe, recalled all those deeds which were virtuous, so that after a penitent soul had been through both streams, only the memory of his good deeds remained, that of all evil ones having been washed away in Lethe. Then Matilda again began to sing, and as she did so she wandered by the side of the stream, and Dante followed her on the other bank until they came to a spot where Dante was facing the east, and then Matilda stood still and told Dante to look and hearken.

And now a wonderful vision was to appear to Dante, for as he looked, he saw a brilliant light which gradually spread through the forest, becoming brighter each minute, and at the same time sweet strains of music were heard. Nearer and nearer came the light, until Dante saw what at first he thought were seven trees of gold, but which, in time, proved to be seven golden candlesticks, each containing a light brighter than that from a full

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moon at midnight, and at the same time he distinguished the sweet music to be the shouting of Hosannas. Dante turned to Virgil in wonder, but Virgil was as much puzzled as Dante, and could not give any explanation. Then again Dante turned to the lights, and now he saw behind them a glorious company, clothed in white of a greater purity than ever existed on earth. They moved slowly onward, and after the seven candlesticks had passed where Dante was standing leaving wonderful trails of light behind them, they also passed before him. First came the writers of the books of the Old Testament, as twenty-four elders in flowing robes, and crowned with wreaths of lilies; they sung a hymn as they walked, and behind them were the Four Evangelists, represented as the four beasts which the prophet Ezekiel describes, and surrounding a wonderful chariot, drawn by a Gryphon, a mythic creature, half lion and half eagle, which is meant as a type of Christ, who also had two natures—the Divine and

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CHARITY, HOPE, AND FAITH.

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the Human. The lower part of this wonderful creature was white and red, and the wings, which were golden, rose out of sight through the trails of light left by the seven candles, as Christ's Divine nature soars beyond our human sight and knowledge. The chariot was on two wheels, which represented the Old and New Testaments; round the one were the four Moral or Cardinal Virtues—Justice, Temperance, Fortitude, and Prudence, represented by four maidens, clad in purple; round the wheel of the New Testament were the three Christian Virtues—Charity, Hope, and Faith; the first clad in red as of fire, the second in green as an emerald, and the third in white as pure as driven snow. Behind the Virtues were seen S. Paul and S. Luke, and behind them again, four of the early Fathers of the Church—S. Jerome, S. Gregory, S. Augustine, and S. Ambrose, followed by S. John, as the author of the Revelations, who walked as if sleeping, but with a rapt expression on his countenance.

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When the procession had reached a point opposite Dante it came to a standstill, and from the car sprang into sight a number of angels, singing Alleluia, and scattering flowers around. Then from their midst slowly arose a lady, wearing a white veil and a crown of olives, and a green mantle over a flame-coloured robe, and Dante at last beheld Beatrice. We know how he had loved her on earth, and how he had longed to see her again. All through his difficult and painful journey with Virgil, it was the prospect of his meeting her which had helped him on, and now in the first ecstasy of seeing her he turned as he had so often done on the journey to Virgil for sympathy and advice; but Virgil was no longer by his side, his time of guidance was over, and Dante would need him no more now that Beatrice could take his place, and Dante, even in his joy at seeing Beatrice, was overcome with grief and dismay at losing "his most sweet Father and Guide," who had helped him and befriended him so long.

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Even the thought of all the delights of Paradise which lay before him, could not prevent Dante from shedding tears, but Beatrice now spoke to him, and for Dante still greater suffering was awaiting. For as she stood before him, Beatrice reminded him of his life since her death, and reproached him with not having made it as high and noble as he ought to have done. Dante was overcome with shame and remorse, for he knew it was true, and remembered his faults and failings with bitter anguish ; all the joy of his meeting with Beatrice, to which he had looked forward so long and eagerly, was turned into bitter shame and misery by his own fault ; but Beatrice did not wish to punish him more than was necessary for his good ; and when at last, overcome with remorse and sorrow, he fell senseless to the ground, Matilda was allowed to plunge him into the waters of Lethe, and he recovered his senses to find himself in the water which cleared away the remembrance of these sins which caused him

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so much pain. After this he was allowed to plunge in the waters of Eunoe, and then, cleansed and purified, he joined the group round Beatrice, who now unveiled and showed her face in its full beauty to his cleansed and adoring eyes.

And now two parts of Dante's wonderful vision were completed, and there awaited him nothing but glory and rapture in the one which still remained, and which was to lead him through the starry courses of heaven.

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CHAPTER XXI

THE SPIRITS IN THE MOON

"Meseem'd as if a cloud had covered us,
Translucent, solid, firm, and polished bright,
Like adamant, which the sun's beam had smit.
Within itself the ever-during pearl
Received us; as the wave a ray of light
Receives, and rests unbroken."

Paradise, canto ii.

DANTE was led through the Heavens by Beatrice, by gazing on whose glorious visage the power to soar was given him, and this power became greater and greater as they ascended, and as Dante's eyes became better able to bear the sight of her beauty. All around them, as they journeyed through the starry spheres, was the most brilliant radiance, and the sounds of sweetest harmonies greeted them at every step. They at length reached

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the very centre of Heaven, the highest point in the whole universe, but on their way thither they passed through different spheres, where some of the saints appeared to them, though they all had a place as well in the Highest Heaven of all.

The first sphere to which they came was that of the Moon. It seemed to Dante like a clear, bright, solid cloud of a pearly hue, in which he saw faint shadowy forms, which he took at first for reflections only, until Beatrice explained to him that they were really spirits. One of them seemed about to speak to Dante, and he begged it to tell him its name and condition. The spirit replied with a smile that Dante ought to recognize her, but the growth of her beauty since she had been in Heaven prevented him from doing so at first, though he had known her well enough on earth, for she was none other than Piccarda Donati, the sister of Dante's own wife, and the one whom Forese had told him had already a heavenly crown.

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She was placed in a low sphere in Heaven, because she had broken a vow on earth, but when Dante asked her if she never longed for a higher place than the one she was in, she smiled at the idea, and told him that a full and perfect contentment reigned throughout Heaven, so that each one of its inhabitants wished for nothing more than they had. And thus Dante learnt that every part of the heavenly sphere was alike Paradise, and that it is a happy and contented spirit which makes a place Heaven.

She told Dante her story briefly, though some of it must have been known to him before. When a young girl she had not cared for all the pleasures of the world, and had determined to go into a convent and devote herself to God. She accordingly joined an Order founded by S. Clara, of whom I shall have a story to tell you later on, and became a nun.

In those stormy days, when quarrels and wars were always raging, convents offered a

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refuge to those who entered them, and to Piccarda, who, from being the sister of Corso, must have been often brought into close contact with the strife of the times, the peaceful life of prayer and service was very sweet. But with such a nature as hers Corso had very little sympathy, and he never favoured her seclusion. He was very ambitious too, as we know, and probably he thought he could improve and strengthen his position through her marriage with some powerful person. So he formed the wicked plan of forcing her from the convent, and poor Piccarda, who had no choice but to yield or forfeit her life, allowed herself to be dragged away from the seclusion of the convent into the tumult of the world, where her vow as a nun was soon broken by a marriage into which Corso forced her. For this Dante thinks she was to blame, since she always had the alternative of death, and it would have been nobler of her to allow herself to be killed than to have yielded, and

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it is for this reason that the gentle Piccarda is not given a place among the greatest saints and holy martyrs whom he meets in the higher spheres of Heaven.

Piccarda did not live long after her marriage, and death must have been a happy release to her when it came, for she told Dante that her life, after she left the convent, was one of unspeakable suffering, and we may be sure her gentle nature must have often looked back with sad regret to her peaceful life there, and that the thought of her broken vow must have tortured her soul with remorse.

Near Piccarda, Dante saw another spirit who had also been forced from a convent in order to fill a high worldly position. This was no other than Constance, who married the Emperor Henry V., and became the mother of Frederick II., and grandmother of the King Manfred whom Dante met on the slopes of Purgatory.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE STORY OF THREE GREAT SAINTS

"I then was of the lambs that Dominic leads."
Paradise, canto x.

"One seraphic all
In fervency; for wisdom upon earth
The other splendour of cherubic light."
Paradise, canto xi.

FROM the sphere of the Moon Dante passed, always soaring upwards, to that of the planet Mercury, where he met the spirits of great rulers, shining as sparkling splendours. Among them was the great Emperor Justinian, who gave him an account of the history of the Roman Empire from its commencement to the time of Charlemagne, who lived some centuries after Justinian himself.

From here Dante passed to Venus, and at each upward stage Beatrice grew more beau-

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THE SPIRITS HERE WERE LIKE GLOBES OF GLOWING LIGHT, AND THEY MOVED ROUND DANTE AND BEATRICE IN EXQUISITE ROTATION.

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tiful and resplendent, and the surrounding light more glorious. Here the spirits rotated in the form of brilliant lights, and among them Dante met with a young prince, Charles of Naples, whom he had known and loved on earth, and with Folco, a famous troubadour.

From the sphere of Venus, Dante and Beatrice soared to that of the Sun itself. The spirits here were like globes of glowing light, and they moved round Dante and Beatrice in exquisite rotation, singing glorious songs the while. Then one of them came forward, and told Dante that he was S. Thomas Aquinas, and pointed out to him other great and learned men, amongst whom were Albertus Magnus, Peter Lombard, and King Solomon.

This S. Thomas was a great man, and his writings had more influence on Dante than any other writer of the same period, so that before passing on I must tell you a little about him. Thomas was the son of the Count of Aquino, a castle in Sicily, and was

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born in 1225. He was educated at a convent school, and from there was sent to the University of Naples, after which he was expected to take his place in the world of politics and pleasure to which his birth entitled him. But, while at Naples, Thomas had come under the influence of the Dominicans, an Order of Friars who gave up all worldly goods, and spent their life wandering from place to place, preaching and teaching; and he determined to follow their example, and become a Dominican Friar himself. He went to France with this intention, but his wish met with the strongest opposition from his family, and his brothers followed him there, and forced him to come back to Sicily, where they imprisoned him in one of the family castles. For two years he was kept there, but nothing would alter his determination, and at the end of that time he escaped, and again joined the Friars. He travelled to Cologne and to Paris, and studied and taught until he became the

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greatest theologian of his age. One of his masters was Albertus Magnus, who was pointed out to Dante among the other spirits by Thomas, and he early recognized the great ability of his pupil. Thomas had a very strong, reserved nature, and did not make friends easily with his companions, who, for his silence, gave him the nickname of "the Dumb Ox of Sicily." But one day, when Albert had been examining Thomas on some difficult question, he exclaimed, "That Dumb Ox will make the world resound with his teaching." This prophecy was fulfilled, but Thomas seems always to have kept his quiet reserved nature, although his fame spread throughout Europe; and he spent the last years of his life in comparative retirement, labouring at the great work on theology which influenced Dante very much later. He died in 1272 at an abbey where he was taken ill on his way to attend a great Council at Lyons, to which he had been invited by the Pope.

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S. Thomas, we have seen, was a Dominican, but there was another great Order of Friars in Italy founded by S. Francis, called the Franciscans, after S. Francis, the founder, one of the most wonderful characters of the Middle Ages, and, as they stood amidst the glowing glory of the Sun, S. Thomas gave Dante an account of this interesting man.

S. FRANCIS was born at a little Italian village called Assisi, which has been associated with his name ever since. His father was a merchant, and Francis began life by following his father's calling. He had a lively disposition as a young man, and was quite the leader of a little band of gay young fellows who loved life and its pleasures; but even at the beginning of his career he showed that wonderful generosity which afterwards distinguished him, and it is said that no beggar ever asked from him in vain. At the age of twenty-five a severe illness first turned the thoughts of Francis to serious things; but it was some time after this that he really devoted

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himself to a religious life. He started to be a soldier, but on his way to Sicily, where was waging the war in which he intended to take part, he had a dream in which it seemed to him that he was told to return to Assisi and find his work there. Francis obeyed this command, and in his native town he began his wonderful life of renunciation and holiness. At that time the loathsome disease known as leprosy was very general in Italy, and S. Francis devoted himself to the poor sufferers from this complaint, going into the hospital or lazars, where they are kept apart from other people, and helping and cheering them with kind words and deeds. He also devoted himself to the rebuilding of some churches which had fallen into disrepair, and finally made his home at one of these, and there others gradually gathered round him, and the order of S. Francis was founded. The monasteries at that time were, as a rule, very wealthy, and the monks lived in great comfort, and even luxury, but S. Francis, in contrast

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to this, determined to follow the example of Christ and his Apostles, to give up all worldly goods and devote his life to preaching and teaching. In his youth he had been very fond of fine clothes, but now he only wore a plain brown woollen gown and girdle, and he walked barefoot, while instead of living in luxury as he had done in his father's house, he depended for his living on such chance food as people gave him. There is a story told of him, that once when obliged to dine at the table of a rich man, he took the sumptuous food offered to him out of courtesy; but instead of enjoying it, he sprinkled ashes over it to spoil the taste, saying as he did so, "Brother ash is pure." The wonderful piety of Francis and his burning zeal continually attracted others to join his Order, and among those who were led to give up the world and its pleasures was a young girl named Clara, the daughter of wealthy parents. She left her home in Assisi by night and came secretly to Francis, and

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then in the little church where the Brothers worshipped she took off all the ornaments and girlish finery with which she was decked, her beautiful long hair was cut off, and she was clothed in the coarse woollen gown of the Order. When this was over she was taken to a place of safety in a convent near, and afterwards removed to the church of S. Damian, and there founded an Order of nuns, who followed the rule of Francis. It was this Order, you will remember, that Piccarda chose when she, like Clara, renounced the gay world in favour of a religious life a century later. But I must tell you a touching story about S. Clara's little sister Agnes before I go on further. She was ten years old at the time that Clara left her home, and she had such a passionate love and admiration for her elder sister that she determined to follow her. So she too crept away from her home and entered the convent. One can imagine what a meeting there would be between the two sisters; how little Agnes must have

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thrown herself into her sister's arms and refused to leave her, and how secretly glad Clara must have been to find all protestations and arguments to persuade Agnes to return home in vain. But at first it seemed that Agnes was not to be allowed to remain with her sister, for her family were naturally very indignant at losing both girls, and a band of fourteen armed men came and tore Agnes away from the convent. But as they dragged her down the hillside, the poor little girl, overcome with terror and dismay, fainted, and her body seemed so heavy to the men, that they thought a miracle had happened, and that she could not be moved, and so at last left her lying unconscious in the field. And there Clara found her later and took her back to the convent, and thus the two sisters were united, and little Agnes became the first of Clara's followers. In the meanwhile the Order increased, and S. Francis sent out Friars, as they were now called, into all parts preaching, and awakening the spirit of

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Christianity among the people. They went into all parts of Italy, and into France and Spain, and some even as far as Germany. An amusing story is told about the latter expedition, for the simple men were so fierce in their zeal to convert, that they never thought of the necessity for them to learn the language of the people they were going to address, and through this they were landed in troubles and difficulties. They had noticed that when offered refreshment and lodging if they said "Ja, Ja" (yes) all seemed right, so when they were asked if they were heretics, and if their intention was to cut off Germany from the Church, they still said "Ja, Ja" to everything, and the consequence was that the people rose up against them and drove them out of the country. Another expedition was sent later, however, with letters to the great priests and ecclesiastics of the land, and this time the Friars were very differently received. Francis himself took a longer journey even than this. He went right across the sea into Egypt,

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where a crusading army was at the time, and boldly entered the camp of the Sultan and tried to convert him. It does not seem that he succeeded in this, but the Sultan received him very courteously, and offered him gifts of money for his charitable purposes. These, however, Francis indignantly refused, saying, it was men's souls and not their money that he wanted. S. Francis died at Assisi, when only forty-four years of age, quite worn out by the labours and hardships he had so cheerfully chosen as his lot. His followers gathered round his death-bed to bid him farewell, and S. Francis seems to have thought of them all and addressed tender words of blessing to each. There is a beautiful fresco of this scene painted by Giotto, in a church in Florence ; in it the brothers are gathered round the dying saint with their eyes fixed on him, all except one, to whom has been granted a special grace, and who stands with face upturned in wondering awe towards a vision of the saint soaring to heaven.

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S. Francis was noted for his gentle kindly nature as much as for his piety; all things came in for a share of his love, and he had that wonderful power over animals which is granted to few people. He used to call them his little brothers and sisters, and they seemed not only to know no fear of him, but to understand what he said to them. Many curious stories are told about him in connection with animals. One day, for instance, when preaching in the open air, the swallows made so much noise chirping and twittering as they built their nest, that his voice could hardly be heard. But S. Francis, instead of growing impatient as many preachers might have done, turned to them and said, "My little sisters, it is now time that I should speak, since you have had your say; listen now in your turn to the word of God, and be silent till the sermon is finished."

Another day a live leveret was brought to him, probably as part of the day's provisions,

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but when he saw the gentle, timid animal, the heart of S. Francis was moved to pity "Little brother leveret," he said, "come to me. Why hast thou let thyself be taken?" The leveret immediately fled from the hands of the brother who held it, and took refuge in the folds of S. Francis's gown, and when S. Francis released it, the leveret, instead of rejoicing in its freedom, returned to its kind protector and would not leave him.

Another time S. Francis turned out of his way to preach a sermon to some birds, who flocked round and showed no signs of fear. "Brother birds," he said to them, "you ought to praise and love your Creator very much. He has given you feathers for clothing, wings for flying, and all that is needful for you. He has made you the noblest of his creatures, He permits you to live in the pure air, you have neither to sow nor to reap, and yet He takes care of you, watches over you and guides you." It is said that the birds began to arch their necks, to spread

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out their wings, to open their beaks, and to look at him as if they understood and wished to thank him.

I have told you these stories about S. Francis and the animals because I think that in them we see part of his character, which is as beautiful as that shown to us by his greater deeds.

Another saint, S. Bonaventura, then gave Dante the story of S. Dominic, who founded the other Order of Friars, that of the Dominicans.

S. DOMINIC was a Castilian by birth, and his parents' names were Felix and Joanna. Even as a little boy he showed the piety for which he was afterwards remarkable, and as was the tendency of the time in which he lived, it found expression in acts of severity towards the body. Often, in the middle of the night, when his nurse awoke expecting to see him warm and comfortable in his bed, she would find him instead kneeling on the bare hard floor rapt in prayer. As he grew older

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he studied very hard, but not from motives of love of fame, but in order to fight better for the cause he longed to serve, and when at last he asked a favour from the Pope, it was for no reward or advantage to himself, but simply for leave to fight the battles of the Church. There was a sect of people in France called the Albigenses, who had kept to a purer form of Christianity than that of the Romish Church, into which so many abuses and corruptions had crept as the years had gone on, and Dominic thought his mission was to try and stamp out what he considered as a dangerous form of heresy. Some very cruel, fierce wars were the result, and though we must make excuses for the age in which Dominic lived, we cannot help regretting that so earnest and powerful a man should not have chosen a better object for his efforts, and have devoted himself to what would seem a more worthy cause.

Later on, after his contest with the Albigenses, S. Dominic founded the Order of

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preaching Friars to which he gave his name, and went to Rome to pray for a blessing on it. There is a legend of a miracle that happened to him when there, of which I must tell you, if only because it is the subject of a beautiful picture painted on the wall of a refectory in Florence. S. Dominic was staying at a monastery in Rome, where the brethren obtained their living by begging, much as the followers of S. Francis used to do, and one day all their efforts to obtain food had been unsuccessful, and when supper-time came there was nothing for any one to eat. It did not seem worth while to the brethren to go to the table at all, this being the case, but S. Dominic persuaded them to take their places, and when they were all seated with the empty table before them, he pronounced the blessing as usual, and behold! when he had finished speaking, two angels were seen to enter, and as the brothers gazed at them in wonder and awe, they placed bread and wine before them and

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vanished. After a life of hard work and preaching, S. Dominic died of fever, and was buried at Bologna, where a splendid shrine was erected to his memory. In his life we have not the beautiful example of humility and tenderness which makes the character of S. Francis so lovable, but for the earnestness and zeal with which he devoted himself to the cause he had chosen, and strove to do what he conceived to be his duty, he too is worthy of our reverence and admiration.

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE BRAVE OLD WARRIOR

"With these and others like to them, I saw
Florence in such assured tranquillity,
She had no cause at which to grieve: with these
Saw her so glorious and so just, that ne'er
The lily from the lance had hung reverse,
Or through division been with vermeil dyed."

Paradise, canto xvi.

AFTER leaving the Sun, Dante came to the sphere of Mars, the ruddy planet named after the god of War, and where he met warriors, such as Crusaders and others, who had fought nobly and for a noble purpose. The planet became redder than usual as Dante and Beatrice drew near, to show the joy with which they welcomed them, and then from amidst the glow appeared two lines of spirits,

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some of which formed themselves into a cross on which a vision of Christ was discerned, while others flitted from one part of it to another. At the same time a sweet confusion of melody was heard, like the *tintinno* of the flute and harp when the notes cannot be clearly distinguished. Dante's rapture was greater now than any he had before experienced, while before his dazzled eyes gleamed the cross of sparkling spirits, and round him sounded the hymn of praise too sublime for mortal ear to follow. Then the hymn ceased, and down the cross shot a spirit which paused at the foot and greeted Dante with warm affection. This was an ancestor of Dante's named Cacciaguida; he had been a famous warrior, and fought in the Crusades in the twelfth century, and he evidently knew of Dante, for he was expecting to see him. It was a great joy to Dante when he heard who the spirit was, for the deeds of Cacciaguida had doubtless been handed down in his family, and he had every reason to be proud

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of his ancestor. Cacciaguida had lived, as his descendant Dante had done, in Florence, and had also been baptized in the same dear baptistery of S. John. He seems also to have shared Dante's love of his native city, and he now gave him a description of it as it was in his own day, contrasting it unfavourably with it as Dante had known it. Florence had been a smaller town then, he told him, and had not begun to spread outside the walls as it did in Dante's day, and the manners of the people had been simple, their customs more homely. The ladies used to dress plainly, instead of decking themselves with chains and coronets, and wearing fanciful shoes of coloured leather or gilt, and girdles so elaborately ornamented that they were more noticeable than the people who wore them. Nor did they touch their faces with paint as had become the bad practice of many fine ladies since. And instead of walking constantly abroad to show their fine clothes, they were content to sit quietly at home at the

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spindle. And as the mother drew out the long threads from the distaff, she would at the same time watch her infant in its cradle and soothe it with that baby language which all babies love and understand, and which she herself had learnt from her mother in her own childhood. Or, as the children grew old enough to understand, she would tell them wonderful stories of the old days of Troy and Rome and Fiesole, and of the great heroes who lived and fought there, and made the names of these places famous for all time.

The men too had simple tastes in those days of which Cacciaguida told, and used to be content to wear simple rough jerkins or tunics, and girdles of leather and bone. Those were peaceful happy days in Florence, very different from the ones in which Dante's own lot was cast. An honest citizen then needed to have no fear of being forced away from hearth and home, and of finding his last resting-place far away from his native walls. How Dante must have longed for those

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happy days to return as he wrote this part of his poem! He too had had a faithful wife and loving children, but a shadow was over his home, for he who should have been its stay, was forced to live far away from them and spend his life in loneliness and exile. Much more did Cacciaguida tell Dante about the Florence of his day and about its inhabitants, and then at Dante's request he foretold his own future life, prophesying to him all the trouble through which Dante had to pass, and telling him how he would be chased from Florence and become an exile and wanderer. The thought of all that lay before him made Dante feel sad, for we must remember that he supposes his vision to have taken place a year or two before his exile; but Beatrice spoke comforting words to him, and when he looked at her, her loveliness had so much increased that he could think of nothing else, and forgot his own troubles for the time in the contemplation of her beauty. Cacciaguida then spoke to him again, and told him the

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names of a great many spirits in the cross, many of which must have been very familiar to him ; for among them were Joshua who had led the children of Israel into the Promised Land, Charlemagne and his heroic nephew Roland, and Godfrey of Bouillon, leader of the first Crusade and afterwards King of Jerusalem. After pointing out these great spirits to Dante, Cacciaguida himself joined the throng, so that Dante saw which was his own place in the cross.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE HIGHEST HEAVEN

"I looked;
And in the likeness of a river, saw
Light flowing, from whose amber-seeming waves
Flashed up effulgence, as they glided on
'Twixt banks, on either side, painted with spring,
Incredible how fair."

Paradise, canto XXX.

DANTE next entered Jupiter, where he saw spirits moving like flocks of joyful birds, and as he watched them they seemed to form glowing letters of gold on a silver background, and he read the words in Latin, "Love justice, ye who rule the earth." Then again the spirits moved and others arose to join them, and before Dante's eyes gleamed an

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eagle, the Imperial sign of Rome, formed of spirits all as bright as rubies shone on by the sun. These spirits were those who loved justice, and among them Dante saw King David and the Emperor Trajan, the story of whose conduct to the poor widow I have told you before; they all joined in singing the most exquisite music, and in the pause of their song they told Dante many wonderful things about the justice of God. In Saturn, which Dante and Beatrice next entered, were many great and holy men, whom they saw ascending and descending on a shining ladder, the summit of which passed out of sight in the glory above. One of these spirits gave Dante a short account of his work on earth. This was S. BENEDICT, and he was born in Italy in 480. As a little boy he was sent to school in Rome, but he found himself among a wild, badly-behaved set of school-fellows there, and at about the age of fourteen he fled from them to Subiaco, a lonely district among the mountains some forty miles away. Here he

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found a cave or underground hole in which he hid, and there he gave himself up to a life of prayer and meditation. One of the monks from a monastery near supplied him with his food, but even he does not seem to have had much intercourse with Benedict, as he lowered it down to him in the cave by means of a cord. In these days we should consider it nobler to face the dangers and temptations which fall in our way and overcome them, than to flee away and hide ourselves, but things were different in Benedict's day, and it was thought a great proof of holiness to live apart as he did, and to spend all one's time in prayer and praise; and certainly it was a life of great self-sacrifice for a young man, and the hard self-imposed discipline of Benedict's youth probably helped to form him into the great and influential man he became. After living in this cave unknown to men for some time, some shepherds found S. Benedict, and through them the fame of his holy life spread, and he

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was appointed Abbot to a monastery near. The monks, however, seemed to have disliked his rule, which was probably more strict than the one they had been accustomed to, and they tried to poison him, so Benedict left them and returned to his beloved Subiaco and built a monastery of his own there. It was a wild, picturesque spot which he chose, perched high on one of the mountain-peaks, with olive and ilex trees growing around it, and a rushing mountain torrent foaming to the valley below. Here again enmity pursued Benedict, and a priest of the neighbourhood, jealous of his power and influence, not only attempted to poison him, but tried to undo his good work, and to tempt the monks under him to disobey their Order. When Benedict found this to be the case, he felt that it would be better for his monastery for him to leave it; it must have cost him a great pang to do so, for we may be sure he must have loved it very much, but Benedict was not a man to flinch from his duty. After

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leaving Subiaco he founded another monastery which became more famous, and in connection with which his name is always remembered now. Going south from Subiaco for some distance he came at length to a high valley or basin, round which arose wild, picturesque mountain-peaks, and in this isolated spot heathenism with all its rites was still practised, and a temple to the god Apollo was standing. This seemed to Benedict the very region for his labours, and before his teaching Christianity soon replaced heathenism. On the ruins of the temple to Apollo he built two chapels, and higher up on an eminence known as Monte Cassino he built his famous monastery. Here, it is pleasant to note, he was followed by a favourite sister named Scholastica, who came accompanied by a few other holy women, and lived in a cell near the monastery. Her presence must have been a great comfort to her brother in the declining years of his life, and a pretty story is told which speaks of their affection for each

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other. One evening Benedict, who had been visiting his sister, rose to depart. Scholastica entreated him to remain longer, but finding all her entreaties in vain she prayed that Heaven would interfere and render it impossible for him to go. Then immediately, so the legend runs, arose such a furious storm that Benedict was obliged to delay his departure for several hours. Afterwards he must have thanked Providence for forcing him to yield to his sister's wish, for Scholastica died two days later, so Benedict never saw her alive again. It is said that he was praying in his cell when she died, and that he had a vision which was sent to announce her death to him, showing him her soul ascending to heaven in the form of a white dove.

Fourteen years after he had founded his monastery, Benedict himself was found dead in the chapel with his arms outstretched, as if in prayer.

When S. Benedict had finished speaking to

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Dante he joined the other spirits again, and Dante beheld them all swept upwards on the ladder of light, as if by a whirlwind, and following a sign from Beatrice, he too was carried up it, and so left the planets and came to the region of Fixed Stars. Here Beatrice bade him pause, and, gazing down through the immense starry space before him, Dante saw this little earth, which he had left but so short a time before, and never before had the poet realized how small and tiny a place it held amid the countless glories, and hosts of sparkling worlds, of God's great universe. As he looked down, he could not help thinking how poor is the aim of those who seek nothing beyond the world and its rewards, and he felt strengthened himself in his purpose of following something nobler, and of being true to that ideal which Beatrice had taught him to love so passionately. But a sight more glorious than even that of all the starry hosts awaited the poet, for, suddenly, the radiance of Beatrice seemed

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to increase, and, at the same time, in a sparkling vision, appeared all the spirits whom he had before seen in their different spheres, and in their midst the figure of the world's Redeemer, Jesus Christ Himself. As He passed from sight again, Dante's eye sought out the Virgin Mary, and he saw her with the Archangel Gabriel encircling her in the form of a crown of light, and heard him sing a sweet song to her. Then she too soared out of his vision, and all the spirits joined in singing a hymn of praise.

After this, Dante had still a higher flight to take in order to reach the very Highest Heaven of all, but, before doing so, he had to pass through an examination on Faith by S. Peter, on Hope by S. James, and on Love by S. John. Having answered their questions satisfactorily, he was led by Beatrice to the Highest Heaven or Empyrean, where his eyes were at first blinded by the light which greeted them, and which, Beatrice told him,

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was the expression of welcome from God to those who entered there; and as he became more accustomed to the glory, he saw what appeared to be a river of light, on the banks of which blossomed the flowers of an eternal spring, on which sparkling drops seemed to fall from the river, till they shone like rubies set in gold. In this stream Beatrice told Dante to bathe his eyes, and, having done so, the scene was quite changed, and he found that what he had taken for a river was in reality the Court of Heaven filled with saints and angels. It was in the form of an enormous rose with white petals, in which sat the Saints, while God's own light shone like a sun in the midst, and the angels flitted from rank to rank, plunging into the petals like a swarm of bees, and ever returning to the golden centre for a fresh increase of the ardour and peace which they spread among the Saints; their faces were of living flame and their wings of gold, and their bodies of a whiteness surpassing that of snow.

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And Dante walked among all this wondrous throng, wondering ever, and longing to be worthy to join them; but, when he turned to Beatrice with the old wish for enlightenment, Beatrice was no longer by his side, and in her place stood S. Bernard, an old man with a radiant face and a kind, paternal expression. Then there broke from the poet's lips the three words, "Where is she?" And the Saint told him that he had been sent by Beatrice to tell him this, and he pointed out to Dante her beloved face far, far away among the thrones, highest in the heavens. Then a prayer of thanksgiving arose from Dante's heart as he thought how he had made his marvellous journey, and of all it had taught him, and how he had been led by it from the path of error; and with this arose also an eager longing to follow those high and noble things which Beatrice had revealed to him. Beatrice did not speak in reply to his words, but from her high place she gazed down at him, and through

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all the sparkling waves of light, past the rows of shining saints and glistening angels, Dante once more beheld that smile which had filled him with exaltation so often before, and with this sweet sign of encouragement and promise, Beatrice bade him farewell.

THE END.

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