1. Introduction to the Paradiso. Invocation of Apollo. Ascend through the Sphere of Fire. The Order of the Universe

The Glory of Him who moveth everything, penetrates all the Universe, and shines more brightly in one part, and elsewhere less. Within the Heaven which most receives His Light I was; and saw what he who thence descends neither knows how, nor hath the power, to tell; for as it draweth near to its Desire, our intellect so deeply sinks therein, that recollection cannot follow it. As much, however, of the holy Realm as in my memory I could treasure up, shall now become the subject of my song. O Good Apollo, for my final task make me as worthy a vessel of Thy Power, as Thou dost ask for Thy dear laurel's gift. One of Parnassus' peaks hath hitherto sufficed me; but with both of them I now must start upon the course which still remains. Enter my breast, and breathe Thou as of old Thou didst, when from the scabbard of his limbs Thou drewest Marsyas forth. O Power Divine, if Thou but lend Thyself to me so much, that I may show the blessed Kingdom's shadow which in my mind is stamped; to Thy dear tree Thou 'lt see me come, and crown me with the leaves my theme and Thou shall cause me to deserve. So seldom, Father, are there any picked, to grace a Caesar's or a Poet's triumph, (the fault of human wills, and to their shame), that His Peneian leaf should bring forth joy within the Joyous Delphic Deity, when for itself it causes one to thirst. A great flame follows from a little spark; perhaps with better voices after me shall men so pray, that Cyrrha will reply. For mortal men the lantern of the world rises through divers passes; but from that which with three crosses brings four rings together, it issues on a more propitious course, and in conjunction with a kinder star, and more in its own image moulds and seals the mundane wax. A pass almost like this had made it morning there and evening here; and all that hemisphere was white, and black the other side; when Beatrice I saw turned toward her left, and looking at the sun; no eagle ever gazed at it so keenly. And even as from the first a second ray is wont to come, and upward start again, as would a pilgrim longing to return; even so to her act, by mine eyes infused through my imagination, mine conformed; and on the sun I gazed beyond our wont. Much is permitted there, which is not here allowed our faculties, thanks to the site created as the human race's home. Not long did I endure it, nor so briefly, as not to see it sparkle all around, as molten iron doth, when out of fire it issues boiling; day then all at once seemed joined to day, as if the One who can had with another sun adorned the sky. With eyes fixed wholly on the eternal wheels stood Beatrice; and I on her fixed mine, from there above removed. Looking at her, I such became within, as Glauces did on tasting of the herb, which in the sea made him a fellow of the other Gods. Transhumanizing could not be expressed by words; let this case, therefore, him suffice, for whom Grace holds experience in reserve. If I, O Love that rulest Heaven, was only that part of me, which Thou didst last create, Thou know'st, that with Thy Light didst raise me up.
When the rotation Thou, by being longed for, dost make eternal, drew me to itself by harmonies distributed and tuned by Thee, it seemed that so much of the sky was by the sun’s flame set on fire, that rain nor river ever made so broad a lake. The newness of the sound, and brilliant light kindled in me a wish to know their cause, never with so great keenness felt; whence she, who saw me ev’n as I beheld myself, opened her mouth to calm my troubled mind, ere I did mine to question, and began: “With false imagining dost thou so dull thyself, that thou perceivest not what else thou wouldst perceive, if thou hadst thrown it off. Thou ’rt not on earth, as thou dost think thyself; but lightning fleeing from its proper place ne’er ran as thou, that art thereto returning.” If I was by her little smiled-out words of my first doubt relieved, within a new one was I the more ensnared; I therefore said: “Already sated, I had found repose from great amazement; but I wonder now how I can these light elements transcend.” Heaving, thereat, a pitying sigh, she turned her eyes upon me with the look a mother gives her delirious child; and then began: “All things, whate’er they be, an order have among themselves; and form this order is, which makes the Universe resemble God. Therein exalted creatures see the trace of that Eternal Worth, which is the end for which the mentioned order is created. Within the ordered state whereof I speak, all natures have their place with different lots, as nearer to their source they are, or less; wherefore toward different ports they wend their way through the vast sea of being, each endowed with instinct, granted it to bear it on. This instinct toward the moon impelleth fire; this is the motive force in mortal hearts; this binds together and unites the earth; nor doth this bow impel those creatures only which lack intelligence, but those that have intelligence and love. The Providence which ordereth all this, with Its own Light e’er calms the heaven, inside of which revolves the one that moveth with the greatest speed. And thither now, as to a place ordained, that bowstring’s power is bearing us along, which to a glad mark speeds whate’er it shoots. ’T is true that, as a form is frequently discordant with the intention of an art, because its matter in response is deaf; so likewise from this natural course at times a creature turns away; for power it hath, though thus impelled, to bend aside elsewhere, (as one may see fire falling from a cloud), if, by false pleasure drawn, that primal impulse turn it aside to earth. If well I judge, no further shouldst thou wonder at thy rising, than at a stream thou dost, which to its foot down from a lofty mountain’s top descends. As great a marvel would it be in thee, if, rid of hindrance, thou hadst sat thee down, as rest, on earth, would in a living flame.” Then toward the sky she turned her face again.

2. The First Heaven. The Moon. Reflected Happiness Inconstant Spirits who failed to keep their Vows

O ye who, in a little boat embarked, have, fain to listen, followed in the wake of this my ship, which, singing, ploughs ahead, go back to see your shores again! Start not upon the ocean; for, if me ye lost, ye might, perhaps, be left behind astray. The seas I sail were never crossed before; Minerva breathes, Apollo is my guide, and all nine Muses point me out the Bears. Ye other few, who early raised your necks for Angels’ bread, on which one here on earth subsists, but with which none are ever sated, ye well may start your vessel on the deep salt sea, if in the furrow of my ship ye stay, ere smooth again the waves become. Those glorious ones, who crossed the seas to Colchis, were not so much amazed, as ye shall be, when Jason turned a ploughman they beheld. The innate and ceaseless thirsting for the Realm in God’s own image made, was bearing us as swiftly as ye see the heavens revolve.
On high looked Beatrice, and I on her;
and in the time, perhaps, an arrow takes
to light, and fly, and from the notch be freed,
I saw that I had come to where a marvel
turned to itself my sight; hence she, from whom
the working of my mind could not be hid,
as glad as she was lovely, turned toward me,
and said: "Direct thy grateful mind to God,
who with the first star hath united us."
Meseemed as if a cloud were covering us,
as luminous and dense, as hard and polished,
as is a diamond smitten by the sun.
Within itself the eternal pearl received us,
as water, though unbroken it remain,
receives within itself a ray of light.
If body I was (nor can one here conceive
how one dimension could endure another,
which needs must be, if body enter body),
the more should we be kindled by the wish
that Essence to behold, wherein is seen
how once with God our nature was conjoined.
Thère will be seen, what here we hold by faith,
not demonstrated, but will self
known be,
which men believe.
"My Lady," I replied, "as best I can
do I devoutly render thanks to Him,
who from the mortal world hath severed me.
But tell me what this body's dark spots are,
which cause the folk down yonder on the earth
to tell each other fables about Cain."
She smiled a little, then she said: "If mortals' opinion therein errs, where key of sense
unlocketh not, surely the shafts of wonder
ought not to pierce thee now; for thou perceivest
that short are Reason's wings, when following sense.
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ought not to pierce thee now; for thou perceivest
that short are Reason's wings, when following sense.
But tell me what this body's dark spots are,
the mingled virtue through the body shines, as, through a living pupil, joy. From this comes what ’tween light and light a difference seems, and not from rarity and density; this is the formal principle which makes, according to its strength, things dark and bright.

3. The First Heaven. The Moon. Reflected Happiness
Inconstant Spirits who failed to keep their Vows

That sun which erst had warmed my heart with love, by proving and refuting, had revealed to me the pleasing face of lovely truth; and I, in order to confess myself corrected and assured, lifted my head as high as utterance of assent required. But, that I might behold it, there appeared a sight, which to itself so closely held me, that my confession I remembered not. Even as from polished or transparent glasses, or waters clear and still, but not so deep, that wholly lost to vision is their bed, the features of our faces are returned so faintly, that upon a pallid brow a pearl comes no less faintly to our eyes; thus saw I many a face that longed to speak; I therefore ran into the fault opposed to that which kindled love ’tween man and fount. As soon as I became aware of them, supposing they were mirrored images, to find out whose they were, I turned mine eyes; and seeing nothing, back again I turned them straight on into the light of my sweet Guide, whose holy eyes were glowing as she smiled. “Be not surprised” she said, “that I should smile at what is childish in thy present thought, since on the truth it trusts not yet its foot, but, as its wont is, turneth thee in vain. Real substances are these whom thou perceivest, assigned here for a vow not wholly kept. Speak to them, then, and hear them, and believe; for from itself the True Light which contents them, permits them not to turn their feet away.” And I addressed me to the shade which seemed most eager to converse, and I began, like one confounded by too great desire: “O well-created spirit, that in rays of life eternal dost that sweetness taste, which never is, untasted, understood, ’t will grateful be to me, if thou content me with thine own name, and thy companions’ lot.” Hence promptly and with laughing eyes she said: “Not otherwise doth our love lock its doors against a just desire, than that Love doth, who willed that all His court be like Himself. A virgin sister was I in the world; and if within itself thy mind look well, my being fairer will not hide me from thee, but thou wilt recognize that I’m Piccarda, who, placed here with these other blessed ones, am happy in the slowest moving sphere. Our wishes, which are only set on fire by that which is the Holy Spirit’s pleasure, rejoice in that our joy was willed by Him.
And this allotment, which appears so low, is therefore giv’n to us, because our vows neglected were, and not completely kept.” Hence I to her: “In these your wondrous faces there shines I know not what that is divine, which from your old appearance changes you; hence in remembering you I was not quick; but what thou now dost tell me helps me so, that I more easily recall thy face.

But, tell me, ye who here so happy are, are ye desirous of a higher place, that ye may see more friends, or make you more?” First with those other shades she smiled a little, and then replied to me so joyously, that she appeared to burn with love’s first fire: “Brother, love’s virtue sets our will at rest, and makes us wish for only what we have, and doth not make us thirsty for aught else. If higher we desired to be, our wishes would be discordant with the will of Him, who here discerneth us, which, thou wilt see, can in these circles not occur, if love be necessary to existence here, and if love’s nature thou consider well. Nay more, essential to this blessed life it is, that we should be within the Will Divine, whereby our wills become one will; and so, even as we are, from grade to grade throughout this Realm, to all the Realm is pleasing, as to its King, who in His Will in-wills us; and His Will is our Peace; and that the Ocean is, whereunto moveth all that It creates, and all that Nature makes.”

Clear was it then to me that every where in Heaven is Paradise, and yet the Grace of Good Supreme rains there in many ways. But as it happens that, if one food sate, and longing for another still remain, for one we ask, and one decline with thanks; even thus with word and act did I, to learn from her what was the nature of the web, whose shuttle she drew not unto its end. “High worth and perfect life in-heaven” she said, “a lady higher up here, in whose rule the robe and veil are worn, that, till death come, both watch and sleep they may beside that Spouse, who every vow accepts, which love conforms to that which pleases Him. To follow her, when I was but a girl I fled the world, and in her habit clothing me, I promised that I would keep within her order’s path. Thereafter men more used to ill than good, out of that pleasant cloister dragged me forth, and God knows what my life was after that. This other splendor also, which reveals itself to thee upon my right, and glows with all the radiance of this sphere of ours, takes to herself what of myself I say; a nun she was, and likewise from her head the shadow of the sacred veils was torn.

But when she, too, was brought back to the world against her wishes and against good usage, she never from the heart’s veil freed herself. This is the splendor of the great Costanza, who by the second Wind of Swabia gave the third and final Power birth.” She thus addressed me, and thereat ‘Ave, Maria’ began to sing, and, singing, disappeared, as through deep water heavy objects do. Mine eyes which followed after her as far as it was possible, on losing her, back to the mark of greater longing turned, and unto Beatrice reverted wholly; but she so flashed upon me, as I gazed, that first my sight endured it not; and this the slower made me in my questioning.
I held my peace; but my desire was painted
upon my face, and far more warmly thus
I asked, than had it been by uttered speech.
Hence Beatrice did ev’n as Daniel once,
when in Nebuchadnezzar he appeased
the wrath, which had unjustly made him cruel;
and “Clearly do I see” she said, “how both
thy wishes so attract thee, that thy thought is
so self-bound, that it is not expressed.
Thou arguest thus: ‘If my good will endure,
why doth the violence of others cause
the measure of my merit to be less?’
Again it giveth thee cause for doubt, that souls
seem to return unto the stars again,
according to the opinion Plato held.
These are the questions which upon thy will
are thrusting equally; I’ll hence deal first
with that one which hath most of venom for thee.
Of all the Seraphs he who most in-Gods
himself, or Moses, Samuel, or, I say,
whichever John thou choose, or even Mary,
have in no other heaven their seats, than have
those spirits which appeared to thee just now,
nor for their being more or fewer years;
but all make beautiful the highest sphere,
and each in different ways enjoys sweet life,
through feeling more and less the Eternal Breath.
They did not here reveal themselves, because
this special sphere had been allotted them,
but to express the lowest heavenly state.
Thus must one speak to your intelligence,
since only from sense-objects can it learn
what it thereafter fits for understanding.
Because of this the Scriptures condescend
to your capacity, and feet and hands
ascribe to God, and yet mean something else;
and Holy Church in human form presents
Gabriel and Michael to you, and the other,
who to Tobias once restored his health.
That which Timaeus teaches of the soul
is not like that which one up here beholds,
for, as he says it, so he seems to mean.
He says that each soul to its star returns,
because he thinks that it was severed thence,
when Nature granted it as form; and yet
his doctrine is, perhaps, of other guise,
than what his words imply, and may possess
a meaning which is not to be despised.
In case he mean that to these wheel-like spheres
returns their influence’s praise or blame,
his bow may hit, perhaps, upon a truth.
This principle, ill understood, once turned
nigh all the world awry, so that, in naming
Jove, Mercury and Mars, it went astray.
The other doubt whereby thy mind is stirred,
less venom hath, because its harmfulness
could not conduct thee elsewhere from my side.
That this our Justice should appear to be
unjust in the eyes of mortals, argues faith,
and not heretical depravity.

But here, because your human understanding
can penetrate this truth with ease, I’ll now,
as thou desirest, render thee content.
If violence it be, when he who suffers
contributes naught to him who uses force,
these souls were not excused because of that;
for will, unless it willeth, is not quenched,
but acts as Nature acts in fire, though turned
a thousand times aside by violence;
for, whether it be bent or much or little,
it yieldeth to the force; and so did these,
when able to regain the holy place.
For if their will had been as absolute
as that which held Lorenzo on his grate,
or that which to his hand made Mutius cruel,
it would, as soon as freed, have urged them back
along the road o’er which they once were dragged;
but wills as firm as that are very rare!
And by these words, if thou hast gathered them,
as it behooved thee to, that doubt is quashed,
which often would have troubled thee again.
But now athwart thine eyes another pass
appears, one such, that from it by thyself
thou wouldst not issue, but wouldst weary first.
I surely have instilled this in thy mind,
that spirits who are happy could not lie,
since such are always near the Primal Truth;
yet from Piccarda thou mayst next have heard
that Constance for the veil retained her love;
but, therefore, seems to contradict me here.
Oft hath it happened, brother, heretofore,
that, to escape from danger, one has done,
against one’s will, what was not right to do;
as, at his father’s rest, Alcmaeon did,
who impious made himself, his mother killing,
in order not to fail in piety.
In such a case I’d have thee think that force
mingles with will, and that they so behave,
that sinful actions cannot be excused.
Absolute will consenteth not to wrong,
but in so far consenteth, as it fears,
unless it yield, to be more greatly harmed.
Hence, when Piccarra puts the matter thus,
that she means it of the will that ‘s absolute,
and of the other I; hence both speak true.
Such was the rippling of the holy stream,
which issued from the Fount whence every truth
derives; and such, it set both doubts at rest.
“O thou beloved of the Primal Lover,
O goddess,” said I then, “whose speech both warms
and inundates me so, that more and more
it quickens me with life, not deep enough
is my love to return thee grace for grace;
but let Who sees and can, provide for this.
I well see that our mind is never sated,
but to express the lowest heavenly state.
and each in different ways enjoys sweet life,
thus must one speak to your intelligence,
since only from sense-objects can it learn
what it thereafter fits for understanding.
Because of this the Scriptures condescend
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That which Timaeus teaches of the soul
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The other doubt whereby thy mind is stirred,
less venom hath, because its harmfulness
could not conduct thee elsewhere from my side.
That this our Justice should appear to be
unjust in the eyes of mortals, argues faith,
and not heretical depravity.
Hence like a shoot doubt rises at the foot
of truth; and this is Nature, which from height
to height impels us toward the mountain's top.
This biddeth me, and this assurance gives me,
Lady, with reverence to inquire of you
about another truth that's dark to me.
I wish to know if one can so content you
for broken vows by means of other things,
that these shall not prove light upon your scales."
Then Beatrice looked at me with her eyes
filled so divinely with the sparks of love,
that, overcome, my vision turned in flight,
and I with bowed eyes almost lost myself.

Mercury The Happiness of Beneficent Activity.
Ambitious Spirits

"If in the heat of love I flame on thee
beyond the measure which is seen on earth,
and vanquish thus the power of thine eyes,
wonder thou not thereat, for this proceeds
from perfect sight, which, as it sees, directs
its feet to penetrate the good perceived.
I clearly see that in thine intellect
the Light Eternal is already shining,
which, if but seen, always enkindles love;
and if aught else seduce the love of men,
't is nothing but some vestige of that Light,
which there, ill-recognized, is shining through.
Thou now wouldst know if for an unkept vow,
one could with other service pay enough,
'gainst prosecution to ensure the soul."
'T was thus that Beatrice began this canto;
and ev'n as one who cuts not short his speech,
her holy argument continued thus:
"The greatest gift which, of His bounty, God
bestowed, when He created, and the nearest
like His own Goodness, and the one most prized
by Him, was Freedom of the Will,
wherewith all creatures with intelligence,
and they alone, both were and are endowed.
Now, if from this thou argue, thou 'lt perceive
a vow's high value, if so made it be,
that God gives His consent, when thou giv'st thine;
for when this pact is closed 'tween God and man
a sacrifice is made of this great treasure,
whereof I speak, and made by its own act.
What, then, in compensation can be given?
In thinking thou canst use thine offering well,
good wouldst thou do with wrongly gotten gain.
On the chief question thou art now informed;
but since in this thing Holy Church exempts,
which seems against the truth I showed to thee,
a little longer must thou sit at table,
because the solid food which thou hast taken,
requires for thy digestion further help.
Open thy mind to what I now reveal,
and fix it therewithin; for having heard
without retaining doth not knowledge make.

In the essence of this sacrifice two things
combine; one, that whereof the sacrifice
is made; the other is the pact itself.
This last can never cancelled be, except
by being kept; and very definite
concerning this is what was said above.
The Hebrews, therefore, were alone compelled
to make an offering, though their offer might,
in some events, be changed, as thou must know.
The other, which thou knowest as its matter,
may well be such, that there will be no sin,
if for some other matter it be changed.
But at his own free will let no one shift
the burden he has placed upon his back,
unless the white and yellow Keys are turned;
and let him deem all permutations foolish,
unless the thing abandoned be contained
in that which is assumed, as four in six.
Whatever, then, weighs by its worth so much,
that it can cause all scales to tip, can not,
by any other spending, be made good.
Let mortals not act lightly with their vows!
Be faithful, and in this thing be not thoughtless,
as Jephthah was, when offering up 'the first,
who should have said: 'I wrongly did,' than keep
his vow, and so do worse; and thou mayst deem
as impious that great leader of the Greeks,
because of whom Iphigenia mourned
for her fair face, and for herself made fools
and wise men weep, who heard of such a rite.
Ye Christians, be more serious when ye act!
Be not like feathers in all winds, nor think that any water will avail to cleanse you! Ye have the Testaments, both Old and New, to guide you, and the Shepherd of the Church; let this for your salvation be enough. If evil greed should teach you otherwise, be men, and not like undiscerning sheep, that in your midst no Jew may laugh at you. Nor do as doth a little lamb, that leaves its mother’s milk, and like a wanton fool, against itself for its own pleasure fights.” Thus Beatrice to me, even as I write; then full of eagerness she turned in that direction, where the world is most alive. Her silence and her change of countenance imposed upon my eager mind, which had ahead of it new questions now. Then as an arrow doth, which strikes the mark, before the bowstring is at rest, even so did we speed on into the second realm. So joyous did I see my Lady there, as into that heaven’s light she entered, that, because of it, the planet brighter grew. And if the star was changed and smiled, what, then, did I become, who, by my very nature, in all ways am susceptible of change! As in a fishpond which is still and clear, the fish draw near to that which from without so cometh, that they take it for their food; I thus saw far more than a thousand splendors approaching us, and there was heard in each: “Lo, here is one, who shall increase our loves.” And as each one came up to me, the shade was seen replete with joy within the bright effulgence issuing from its midst. Think, Reader, if what here is entered on should not proceed, how full of pain would be thy craving to know more; and by thyself thou ‘lt see how great was my desire to hear from these, about the state of their existence, as soon as to mine eyes they were revealed. “O well-born spirit, to whom Grace permits to see the thrones of Heaven’s eternal triumph, ëre thy life militant be left behind, we by the light throughout all Heaven diffused are kindled; hence, wouldst thou inform thyself respecting us, be sated at thy will.” Thus was it said to me by one of those kind spirits; and by Beatrice: “Speak, speak, with freedom, and, as thou wouldest gods, believe!” “I clearly see how thou in thine own light dost nest thyself, and from thine eyes dost flash it, they beam so radiantly, when thou dost smile; but who thou art I know not, nor why thou, deserving soul, hast that sphere’s grade, which veils itself from mortals with another’s rays.” Thus I, when I had turned me toward the light which had addressed me first; far brighter then it made itself than it had been before. As doth the sun, which by exceeding splendor itself conceals itself, whene’er its heat has gnawed away the tempering of dense mists; so by increase of joy that holy form in its own radiance hid itself from me; and, wholly thus wrapped up, in such a way replied to me, as sings the following song.


When Constantine had turned the Eagle back, counter the course of heaven its flight pursued behind the Ancient who Lavinia wedded, a hundred and a hundred years and more the Bird of God on Europe’s verge abode, hard by the mountains whence it issued first; and ‘neath the shadow of its sacred plumes it governed there the world from hand to hand, and, changing thus, reached mine. Caesar I was, and am Justinian, he, who by the will of that First Love which now I feel, withdrew the useless and excessive from the laws. And I, before attending to this work, believed that Christ one only nature had, not more, and was with such a faith content; but blessed Agapetüs, who was then the highest Shepherd, set me by his words upon the pathway of the genuine faith. Him I believed, and what was in his faith I now see clearly, even as thou dost see that contradictions are both false and true. As soon as with the Church I moved my feet, God, of His Grace, with that great task was pleased to inspire me, and thereto I gave me wholly; war to my Belisarius I entrusted, to whom Heaven’s right hand was so well conjoined, it seemed a sign that from it I should rest.
Here, then, to thy first question ends my answer; its nature, though, constrains me to go on with something more, that thou mayst see how rightly against the holy Standard moves both who appropriates, and who opposes, it.

See what great virtue caused it to deserve respect; for from that moment it began, when Pallas died to give it sovereignty. Thou knowest that in Alba it sojourned three hundred years and more, till finally three against three fought for its sake again; thou knowest, too, what from the Sabines' wrong, through seven kings, till Lucretia's grief, it did, conquering the neighboring peoples all around. Thou knowest what it did, 'gainst Brennus borne, and Pyrrhus, and against the other Kings and self-ruled States, by Rome's elect, whereby Torquatus, Quinctius, for his unkempt locks surnamed, the Decii and Fabii, acquired the fame which gladly I embalm. It brought the pride of those Arabians low, who traversed, in the wake of Hannibal, those Alpine rocks, whence thou, Po, glidest down. Scipio and Pompey triumphed under it when young; and bitter to that hill it seemed, beneath which thou wast born. Then, near the time when willed it was by Heaven, that all the world should be reduced to its own peaceful state, Caesar assumes it at the hest of Rome. And that which from the Var unto the Rhine it did, the Saâne, Isère and Seine perceived, and every valley whence the Rhone is filled. What next it did, when, issuing from Ravenna, it leaped the Rubicon, was such a flight, that neither tongue nor pen could follow it. Toward Spain it wheeled its host around; then turned Durazzo-ward; and smote Pharsalia so, that to the torrid Nile the pain was felt. Antandros and the Sîmois, whence it started, it saw again, and there where Hector lies; then, ill for Ptolemy, it roused itself. Thence with the speed of lightning it swooped down on Juba: toward your West it next turned back, for there it heard Pompeian trumpets blow. For what it did with its next Standard-bearer, Brutus, and Cassius with him, barks in Hell; Môdena and Perugia, too, it grieved. Sad Cleopatra, who, before it fleeing, took from the asp a dark and sudden death, is weeping still for what with him it did. With him it reached the distant Red Sea's shore; with him it brought the world to such a state of peace, that Janus had his temple closed. But what the Sign which causes me to speak, had done before, and after was to do, throughout the mortal world which owns its sway, comes to seem small and dark, if in the hand of its third Caesar it be looked upon with clearly seeing eyes and spirit pure; because the Living Justice which inspires me, granted that Sign, when in the latter’s hand, the glory of carrying out its wrath's revenge. Now wonder here at what I further tell thee: when this was done, with Titus it ran on to avenge the avenging of the ancient sin. And later, when the tooth of Lombardy the Holy Church had bitten, Charles the Great came to her help by conquering 'neath its wings. Thou now canst judge of those I charged above, and of their sins, which all your woes produced. Against the public Standard one sets up the yellow Fleur-de-lys, while yet another appropriates it to a party's use; hence hard it is to see which sinneth most. Let, then, the Ghibellines their tricks perform under some other sign; for this one he e'er follows ill, who it from justice parts! Nor let this new Charles smite it with his Guelfs, but let him rather fear the taloned claws, which from a greater lion once stripped off his hide! Often have sons ere now bewailed their father’s guilt; hence let none think that God will for his Lilies change His Coat-of-arms! This little star of ours adorns itself with those good spirits who have active been, that fame and honor might live after them; and when, thus deviating, one’s desires tend thitherward, the rays of true love needs must upward mount with less intensity. But in the balancing of our rewards with our deserts, part of our joy consists, because we see them as nor more nor less. Hereby the Living Justice sweetens so our love in us, that it can nevermore be turned aside to any kind of wrong. Voices that differ make on earth sweet music; so in this life of ours its different grades
produce sweet harmony among these spheres. And in the present pearl there shines the light of Romeo, he whose beautiful and great performance was ungratefully repaid. And yet the Provençals who ‘gainst him worked, laugh not; he, therefore, takes an evil path, who to his harm another’s good deeds turns. Four daughters, and each one of them a queen, had Raymond Berenger; and, though low-born and alien, Romeo ‘t was did this for him; then slandering words led Raymond to demand a reckoning of this upright man, who five and seven had rendered him for every ten. Thereat, though poor and old, he went his way; and if the world but knew the heart he had, while crust by crust he begged his livelihood, much as it praises, it would praise him more!"


“Hosanna, O Thou Holy God of Hosts, that with Thy Clarity dost brighter make the happy fires of these celestial realms!” As thus to his own song he turned himself, by me that substance was seen singing now, o’er which a double light two-folds itself; and to their dance both that one and the rest addressed themselves; and then, like swiftest sparks, with sudden distance veiled themselves from me. In doubt I was, and to myself kept saying: “Tell, tell it to her; tell” I said, “my Lady, who with her sweet distillings slakes my thirst!” That reverence, though, which masters all of me by the mere syllables of be and ìce, bowed me like one that’s overcome by sleep. A short while Beatrice endured me thus; then, lighting up my face with such a smile, as, even in fire, would bless one, she began: “As I am unmistakably aware, how a just vengeance could have been avenged with justice, hath occasioned thee to doubt; but I shall quickly liberate thy mind; hence listen, for my words will now bestow on thee the present of a mighty truth. By not accepting for the power that wills a helpful curb, the man who was not born, damning himself, damned all his progeny; wherefore the human race lay sick below in serious sin for many centuries, until the Word of God was pleased descend to where the nature, which had wandered far from its Creator, to His Self He joined, by the mere act of His Eternal Love. Now turn thy sight to what is argued now! This nature, thus united to its Maker, was, as when first created, pure and good; but through its own fault was in banishment exiled from Paradise, because it turned out of the path of truth and its own life. As to the suffering, therefore, which the cross afforded, none so justly ever bit, if measured by the nature thus assumed; and likewise none was ever so unjust, considering who the person was that suffered, within whom such a nature was conjoined. From one act, therefore, issued things diverse; for one same death pleased both the Jews, and God; it caused the earth to quake, and opened Heaven. No longer strange should it appear to thee henceforth, when it is said a just revenge was by a just court afterward avenged. But I perceive that now, from thought to thought, thy mind is in a knot tied up, from which with great desire it seeks to free itself. Thou sayest: ‘What I hear I clearly see; but from me hidden is why God should will for our redemption just this way alone.’ Buried, my brother, lieth this decree from all men’s eyesight, whose intelligence hath not in love’s flame reached maturity. However, inasmuch as on this mark great is the gazing, and but little seen, I’ll say why this one was the worthiest way. Goodness Divine, which spurneth from Itself all envy, burning in Itself, so sparkles, that Its eternal beauties It displays. Whatever from It is immediately distilled, hath afterward no end; for when
It sets its seal, its stamp is not removed.
Whatever from It is immediately
rained down, is wholly free, for that lies not
under the power of secondary things.
Since most like It, it gives it greatest pleasure;
because the Holy Fire which lighteth all things,
is brightest in what most resembles It.
The human creature is by all these things
advantaged; hence, if one of them be lacking,
it needs must fall from its nobility.
Nothing but sin deprives it of its freedom,
and maketh it unlike the Highest Good,
thus little is it whitened by Its Light;
and to its dignity it ne'er returns,
unless, where sin has emptied, it fill up,
for evil pleasures, with just penalties.
When in its seed your nature wholly sinned,
it was of all these dignities deprived,
as well as banished far from Paradise;
nor could they be regained by any path,
except by crossing one of these two fords:
either that of His courtesy alone,
God should forgive it, or that by itself
mankind should for its folly make amends.
Fixed as attentively upon my words
as thou art able, thrust thou now thine eye
within the Eternal Counsel's deep abyss!
Since finite, man could never make amends,
because unable in humility,
by new obedience, to descend as far,
as, disobeying, he had meant to mount;
and this the reason is why man was barred
from making satisfaction by himself.
It, hence, behooved that God by His own ways
should reinstate man in his perfect life,
by one, I mean, or else by both at once.
But since so much more grateful is the work
a workman does, the more it represents
the goodness of the heart from which it comes,
Goodness Divine, which on the world imprints
Its seal, was pleased to move by all Its paths
to raise you up again. Nor hath there been,
or will there ever be, by either way,
between the first of days and last of nights,
so high and so magnificent a plan;
for God was far more bountiful in giving
Himself, to make man fit to raise himself,
than had He only of Himself forgiven;
therefore all other means had fallen short
of Justice, if the Son of God had not
humbled Himself, incarnate to become.
But, wholly to fulfill thine every wish,
I'll now go back to clarify one point,
thou mayst see as plainly there as I.
Thou say'st: 'I see that water, nay, I see
that fire and air and earth, and all
their mixtures become corrupt, and but a little while
endure; and yet created things were these!
If, therefore, what was said above were true,
looks fondly, now behind, and now in front. Of our ascending to it I was not aware; but that we in it were, my Lady, whom grown more fair I saw, assured me fully. And then, as in a flame a spark is seen, and as within a voice a voice is heard, when one remains and the other goes and comes; so I in that light other lamps beheld, whirling with greater speed or less, I think, according to each lamp’s eternal vision. Out of cold clouds there ne’er descended winds, or visible or not, so swiftly moving, that they would not appear restrained and slow to one who had perceived those lights divine draw near to us, when they had ceased the circling, among the exalted Seraphs first begun. And in the foremost to appear, “Hosanna” resounded so, that I have never since lacked the desire of hearing it again. One then drew nearer to us, and alone began: “We all are ready at thy pleasure, that thou mayst have thy joy of all of us. In one ring, with one circling and one thirst, we with the heavenly Principalities revolve, to whom once from the world thou saidst: ‘Ye who the third heaven by your knowledge move;’ and we ‘re so full of love, that, thee to please, a little quiet will not seem less sweet.’” After mine eyes had toward my Lady turned with reverent questioning, and she herself had with herself contented and assured them, back toward the light they turned, which of itself had made such promise, and “Who are ye, say?” was what I voiced with great affection toned. And how much greater did I see it grow, in size and quality, with that new joy, which, when I spoke, was added to its joys! Grown thus, it said to me: “The world below had me not long; but had it done so longer, much evil that will be, would not have been. The gladness which around me radiates, and, like a creature by its own silk swathed, conceals me here, now keeps me hidden from thee. Much didst thou love me, and good cause hadst thou therefor; since, had I been on earth, much more would I have shown thee than the leaves of love. That left-hand bank, which by the Rhone is washed, just after it has mingled with the Sorgue, looked in due time to have me as its lord; as did the Ausonian horn, which is with Bari, Gaêta and Crotona towned, and whence the Trento and Verde pour into the sea. Upon my brow already blazed the crown of that land which the Danube irrigates, when it abandons its Germanic banks; and fair Trinacria, which grows dark with smoke between Pachynus’ and Pelorus’ capes over the gulf which Eurus vexes most, not through Typhoèus, but through nascent sulphur, would still be waiting for its kings, through me from Charles and Rudolph sprung, had not ill rule, which always angers subject peoples, stirred Palermo to the point of shouting: “Die!” And did my brother but foresee this now, the greedy poverty would he avoid of Catalonia, that it harm him not; for verily provision must be made by him, or by another, that no load be further laid upon his burdened bark. His nature, which descended mean from one which liberal was, would such retainers need, as would not care to fill their coffers up. “Since I, my lord, believe the joy profound thy speech infuses in me, is by thee perceived, where every good thing both begins and ends, as I perceive it, all the more grateful it is; and I am also glad that this thou see’st by looking up at God. As thou hast made me happy, make it clear, for thou hast moved me by thy words to doubt, how out of sweet seed bitter seed can spring.” This I to him; and he: “If I can show a truth to thee, to that which thou dost ask thou ‘lt hold thy face, as thou dost now thy back. The Good which turns and sateth all the Realm through which thou mountest, makes His providence a power within these mighty bodies here; and not alone are natures in that Mind foreseen, which of Its own self perfect is, but they themselves, and with them their well-being; hence, all this bow shoots forth falls predisposed unto an end foreseen, as would an arrow aimed at its destined mark. Were this not so, the heaven through which thou now art journeying, in such a way would its effects produce, that ruins they would be, not works of art; nor can this be, unless the Intellects which move these stars are faulty, and the First, who failed to make them perfect, faulty, too.
Wouldst have this truth become more white for thee?"
And I: "No, truly, for I see that Nature,
in what is needful, cannot get fatigued."
Then he: "Now say: would it be worse on earth
for man, if he were not a citizen?"
"Yes," I replied, "nor do I here ask why."
"And can he be, unless men there below
in different ways for different functions live?
No, if thereon your teacher writeth well."
So far he came, deducing thus; then closed:
"Because of this the roots of your effects
must different be; hence one is Solon born,
Xerxes another, and Melchisedech
another, and another he, who lost his son
while flying through the air. Revolving Natu
which is a seal to mortal wax, performs
her function well, but no distinction makes
'tween one and any other dwelling-
place. It hence results that Esau in his seed
differs from Jacob, while Quirinus comes
from such a common father, that ascribed
to Mars he is. A generated nature,
unless divine foresight prevailed, would always
follow along its generators' path.
Now that which was behind thee is before;
but that thou know that thou dost give me pleasure,
I 'd have a corollary mantle thee.
Nature,
whene'er she finds a destiny
discordant with her, like all other seed
in soil unsuited to it, always fails;
and if the world down there but set its mind
upon the basal plan which Nature lays,
and followed it, 't would have its people good.
But to religion
ye now wrest aside
one that is born to gird him with a sword;
and make a king of one that 's fit to preach;
the course ye take is, therefore, off the road."

The Spirits of Lovers

After thy Charles, fair Clemence, had resolved
my doubts, he told me of the treacheries,
his offspring were to undergo; and said:
"Be silent now, and let the years roll by!"
Hence I can only say to you that tears
will justly follow on your people's wrongs.
And now the spirit of that holy light
back to the Sun, which filleth it, had turned,
as to the Good which sateth everything.
Alas, ye souls deceived and impious creatures,
who from such goodness tear your hearts away,
and turn your temples unto vanity!
And hereupon, another of those splendors
in my direction came, and signified,
by brightening outwardly, its wish to please me.
The eyes of Beatrice, which, as before,
were fixed upon me, gave me full assurance
of her beloved assent to my desire.
"Prithee, blest spirit, satisfy my wish
at once," I therefore said, "and give me proof
that what I think, I can reflect in thee."
Whereat the light which still was new to me,
out of its depths, whence it had sung before,
went on, like one whom doing good delights:
"In that part of Italia's evil land,
which 'tween Rialto's island and the Brenta's
and Piave's fountain-heads is situated,
a hill ascends, nor rises very high,
whence once a torch came down, which terribly
assaulted all the country round about.
From one same root both I and it were born;
Cunizza called, I here refugent am,
because the light of this star vanquished me.
But gladly I forgive myself the cause
of my allotment here, which grieves me not;
which to your common people might seem strange.
Of this dear brilliant jewel of our heaven,
which nearest is to me, a mighty fame
remains behind; and, ere it die away,
this hundredth year will yet quintupled be.
See whether one should excellent become,
so that the first may leave another life!
But thus the present mob, the Adige's
and Tagliamento's streams enclose, thinks not;
nor doth it yet, though scourged by wars, repent.
But at the Marsh 't will happen soon that Padua
will change the waters which Vicenza bathe,
because its folk were restive to their duty.
And where the Sile and Cagnano mate,
one lordeth it and goes with head erect,
for trapping whom even now the net is made.
Feltro will yet bewail the faithlessness
of its bad shepherd, which will be so foul,
that Malta was not entered for the like.
Too large would be the wine-vat which could hold
all the Ferrara blood — and weary one
who tried to weigh it ounce by ounce —
which shall this courteous priest’s donation be,
to prove his party loyalty; and gifts
like this will with the country’s life conform.
Mirrors there are above, (ye call them Thrones),
whence on us God as Judge reflects His light;
so that these words of ours seem good to us.”
She here ceased speaking; then int
she seemed
on something else, because she set herself
to wheel around, as previously she did.
The other joy, already known to me
as something noble, in my sight became
a perfect ruby smitten by the sun.
Splendor up yonder is by joy acquired,
as smiles
are here; but down below a shade
outwardly darkens, when the mind grows sad.
“God seeth all,” I said, “and thy will so
in-Hims itself, blest spirit, that no wish
can rob thee of itself. Therefore thy voice,
which, with the song of those devoted fires,
who with their six wings make themselves a cowl,
is always charming Heaven, why gives it not
contentment to my wishes? I, indeed,
would not await thy asking me, if I
in-thee’d myself as thou in-me’est thee.”
“The greatest valley o’er which water spreads”

thereat his words began, “except the sea
which forms a garland round the earth, extends
counter the sun so far ’tween alien shores,
that it can make meridian of a place,
where it is wont to make horizon first.
On that sea’s shore I dwell, ’tween Ebro’s mouth
and Magra’s, which, for but a short way, parts
the Tuscan region from the Genoese.
With almost equal set and rise of sun
sits both Buggèa and the city whence
I was, which with its blood once warmed its port.
Folco that people called me, unto whom
my name was known; and this heaven is by me
impressed, as I was formerly by it;
for Belus’ daughter, when she troubled both
Sichaeus and Creûsa, burned no more
than I, as long as it beseemed my hair;
nor did that Rhodopean maid, whose love
Demôphoôn deceived, nor yet Alcides,
while in his heart he kept Iole locked.
Yet we are not repenting here, but smiling,
not for the sin, which to our minds returns not,
but for the Worth which ordered and foresaw.
Here at the art we gaze which beautifies
so great a work, and only see the Goodness
whereby the world above turns that below.
But so that thou mayst bear away with thee
thy wishes all fulfilled, which in this sphere
were born, still further must I needs proceed.
Who is within this light, thou fain wouldst know,
which right here at my very side is sparkling,
as rays of sunlight shine in limpid water.
Know, then, that Rahab finds her rest therein;
and, to our order being joined, with her
it stamps itself in a supreme degree.
By this heaven, where the shadow your world makes
ends in a point, before all other souls
was she received, that triumph with the Christ.
It well behooved to leave her in some heaven
to be a palm of that great victory,
which by both hands was won, because she favored
Joshua’s first glory in the Holy Land,
which little stirs the memory of the Pope.
Thy town, which is a plant once sowed by him,
who first against his Maker turned his back,
and through whose envy many tears are shed,
brings forth and spreads abroad the cursèd flower,
which, having of the shepherd made a wolf,
hath caused both sheep and lambs to go astray.
The Gospels and great Doctors are for this
despised; and only the Decretals conned,
as is apparent by their margins’ state.
On this are Pope and Cardinals intent;
the
ir thoughts turn not toward Nazareth, where Gabriel
once oped his wings. But both the Vatican
and all the other chosen parts of Rome,
of old the burial place of that militia,
which followed in the path which Peter trod,
will soon be freed from this adultery.”
Looking upon His Son with all the Love, which both of them eternally breathe forth, the Primal and Unutterable Power with so great order made whate’er revolves through mind or space, that none who look at it can ever be without a taste of Him.

Lift, therefore, Reader, to the heavenly wheels thine eyes with me, directly to the region, where one of their two motions strikes the other; and there begin to contemplate with love that Master’s art, who in Himself so loves it, that never doth His eye abandon it.

And now see how from thence the oblique ring, which bears the planets with it, branches off, to please the world which calls upon them; how, in case their path were not thus bent aside, in vain would be much virtue in the heavens, and dead well nigh all potencies down here; and how, if from the straight line, more or less removed, it swerved, much in the mundane order would lacking be below and up above.

Now, Reader, on thy bench remain, and what is here foretasted, follow out in thought, if thou, e’er weary, wouldst be very glad.

Food have I set before thee; feed thou now thyself; because the theme, whose scribe I’m made, unto itself is wresting all my care!

The greatest of the ministers of Nature, which with the power of Heaven imprints the world, and with its light measures our time for us,

joined with the section touched upon above, was circling now around the spiral rings, wherein it earlier shows itself each day; and I was in it, but was not aware of my ascent, except as one, before a thought has come, is conscious of its coming.

’T is Beatrice, who thus from good to better conducts one with such swiftness, that her act extendeth not through time. In its own self how bright must that have been, which in the Sun, which I had entered, was not visible by color, but by light! Though I on genius, practice and art should call, I could not so describe it, that it e’er could be imagined; but it can be believed, and sight of it should be desired! And for such heights if low be our imagination, is no wonder; for no eye ever reached beyond the sun.

Such the fourth family here of that Exalted Father, who ever states it by revealing how He breathes forth, and how He generates.

And Beatrice began: “Give thanks, give thanks unto the Angels’ Sun, who, of His Grace, hath raised thee up to this material one!”

No mortal heart was ever so disposed to be devoted, and with all its pleasure give itself up to God, as I became at those last words of hers; hence all my love set itself so on Him, that Beatrice in my forgetting mind became eclipsed.

And she disliked it not, but smiled at it, so that the splendor of her laughing eyes shared with more things my undivided mind.
I many keen and dazzling splendors saw,
who, sweeter voiced than in appearance bright,
made us a center and themselves a crown.
Latona’s daughter we behold at times
thus girded, when so pregnant is the air,
that it retains the thread that forms her zone.
Within the court of Heaven, whence I return,
are many jewels found, so fair and precious,
that from the Kingdom they may not be moved;
and of these was the singing of those lights.
Let him who doth not feather him to fly
up there, await the dumb for news from thence.
And then, when singing thus, those burning suns
had all around us whirled themselves three times,
like stars, that near unmoving poles revolve,
ladies they seemed to me, who though not through
with dancing, yet in silence stop a while, and list
till they have caught the music’s coming notes.
In one I heard beginning: “Since the ray
of Grace, whereby true love is set on fire,
and afterward, by dint of loving, grows
and multiplies, is shining in thee so,
that it retains the thread that forms her zone.
Thou fain wouldst know what blooms this wreath
enflowers
itself withal, which, circling round her, woos
the Lady fair who makes thee strong for Heaven.
One of that holy flock’s young lambs was I,
which Dominic leads along the path, whereon
one thriveth well, if one go not astray.
The nearest on my right here was my brother
and teacher; he was Albert of Cologne,
and Thomas of Aquinum I. If thus
of all the other lights thou wouldst be sure,
follow behind my words of praise,
and list, that I repeat, in words
for clearly must one needs distinguish here.
In doubt, thou wouldest that I repeat, in words
so clear and so distinct that they will suit
thine understanding, that late speech of mine,
wherein I said: ‘No second hath arisen;’
and where I said: ‘No second hath arisen;’
for clearly must one needs distinguish here.
The Providence, which with that counsel rules
the world, whereby, before it reach the bottom,
every created sight is overcome,

The Spirits of Theologians and Philosophers. St. Francis

O foolish care of mortal men, how full
of fallacies the syllogisms, which cause thee
over a nether course to beat thy wings!
One given to legal learning went his way,
one medicine, the priesthood one pursued,
and lordship one, by force or sophistry;
one practised theft, and public business one,
one, in the pleasures of the flesh involved,
was growing weary, one to idleness
and ease was giving up hi
other, from all these things set free, was up in Heaven
with Beatrice so gloriously received.
When each had to the point returned again,
where in the ring he was before, he stayed there,
still as a candle in a candle-stick.
And I within the light which had before
addressed me, heard one smilingly begin,
as more and more resplendent it became:
“As with Its radiance I am shining here,
so I, by gazing at the Eternal Light,
learn whence thou tak’st occasion for thy thoughts.
In doubt, thou wouldest that I repeat, in words
so clear and so distinct that they will suit
thine understanding, that late speech of mine,
wherein I said: ‘Whereon one thriveth well,’
and where I said: ‘No second hath arisen;’
for clearly must one needs distinguish here.
The Providence, which with that counsel rules
the world, whereby, before it reach the bottom,
every created sight is overcome,
in order that the Bride of Him, who cried aloud, and spoused her with His blessed blood, might go toward her Delight, safe in herself, and unto Him more faithful, too, ordained in her behalf two Princes who should serve as guides to her on this side and on that. One, in his burning love, was all Seraphic; the other, by his wisdom, was on earth a splendor of Cherubic light. I’ll speak of one of them, for both are spoken of, when one is praised, whichever one be taken, for to the same end were the deeds of both.

Between Tupino and the stream that flows adown the hill which blest Ubaldo chose, a lofty mountain’s fertile slope impends, from which Perugia feels at Porta Sole both cold and heat; while, for their heavy yoke, behind it Gualdo and Nocera weep. Out of this hillside, where it breaketh most its steepness, to the world a sun was born, as out of Ganges this one is at times; therefore let him who talks about that place not say Ascesi, which were not enough; but Orient say, if he would rightly speak.

Not distant from his rising was he yet, when he began to cause the world to feel somewhat encouraged by his wondrous virtue; for, still a youth, he strove against his father for such a Lady’s sake, that unto her, as unto death, none open pleasure’s door; and then, before his church’s legal court, and in his father’s presence, joined himself to her; and ever after day by day loved her the more intensely. She, bereft of her First Husband, slighted and scorned, remained unwwooed eleven hundred years and more, till that one came; nor aught availed to hear, that he, whom all the world was fearing, found her undaunted, with Amyclas, by his voice; nor aught, her being so unmoved and firm, that ev’n when Mary stayed beneath it, she went up with Christ upon the cross. But now, lest in my long talk I proceed too darkly, take Poverty and Francis as these lovers. Their concord and their joyful countenance caused wonder, love and gentle looks to end in others’ holy thoughts; and so much so, that venerable Bernard was the first to bare his feet, and run behind such peace, and, running, feel that he was slow of foot. O wealth unrealized, O fertile goodness! Egidio bares his feet; Sylvester his, behind the groom, so pleasing is the bride! That father, then, and master went his way with both his Lady and that family, which now was girding on the humble cord; nor let base-heartedness weigh down his brow for being Peter Bernardone’s son, nor yet for seeming so contemptible to others; but revealed his stern resolve to Innocent with royal dignity, and won from him his Order’s primal seal.

When Poverty’s beloved followers had grown behind the man, whose wondrous life would in the glory of Heaven be better sung, the holy purpose of this head of flocks was through Honorius by the Holy Spirit crowned with a second crown. Thereafter, when, by reason of his thirst for martyrdom, Christ and the rest, His followers, he had preached before the haughty Soldan; and, on finding his folk too restive to conversion, not to stay in vain, returned to pick the fruit of Latin fields; among the savage rocks, which ’tween the Tiber and the Arno rise, he took from Christ himself the final seal, which on his limbs he bore for two whole years. When Him it pleased, who granted him such weal, to draw him up to that reward, which he, by making himself lowly, had deserved, to his own brethren, as to rightful heirs, he recommended his most precious Lady, and ordered them to love her faithfully; then from her bosom his illustrious soul willed to depart, and to its realm returned, and for its body wished no other bier.

Think now what he was, who, as his companion, was worthy deemed to keep the bark of Peter true to its course, when sailing on the deep! That was our Patriarch; thou, hence, canst see that he who follows him as he commands, loadeth his vessel with good merchandise. And yet his flock, so greedy for new food hath grown, that it can hardly fail to scatter through various wood and mountain pasture lands; and hence, the more his sheep like vagabonds wander away, and further go from him,
emptier of milk do they regain the fold. Yet surely some there are, who, dreading harm, cling to their shepherd; but so few are these, that little cloth will furnish them with cowls. If, now, my words have not been indistinct, and if thy hearing hath attentive been, and thou recall to mind what I have said, partly contented will thy wishes be; because thou 'lt see the plant whence hewn they are, and what the limitation means: ‘Whereon one thriveth well, if one go not astray.’

The Spirits of Theologians and Philosophers. St. Dominic

As soon as e’er the blessèd flame had voiced its final word, the holy wheel began to whirl; and in its circling had not moved around completely, ere another wheel enclosed it in a ring, and each to each matched with its own its motions and its songs; songs which, in those sweet pipes, as far surpass our Muses and our Sirens, as a primal splendor surpasses one reflected from it. As when, both parallel and like in hue, two rainbows o’er a tender cloud are drawn, when Juno issues orders to her maid, the outer being from the inner born, as is the speaking of that wandering nymph, whom love consumed as mists are by the sun; and cause folk here, by reason of the pact which God with Noah made, to prophesy about the world, that it will not again be flooded; so, of those eternal roses the two wreaths turned around us there, and so the outer with the inmost harmonized. After the dance and great high feast of song, and flaming interplay of light with light in joyful happiness and tender love, had of a sudden and with one accord grown quiet, even as eyes do, which must close and open at the will of what attracts them; out of the heart of one of those new lights a voice came forth, as to its ‘where’ I turned, which made me seem a needle to its star. And it began: “The love which lends me beauty, draws me to talk about that other Leader, for whose sake mine is so well talked of here. Where one is, right it is to introduce the other; so that, since they fought together, their glories likewise may together shine. Christ’s host, which cost so much to arm anew, was slowly, timidly, and small in numbers moving behind its Standard, when the Emperor who ever reigns, provided, of His Grace alone, for His endangered host, and not because of its deserts; and helped His Bride, as it hath here been said, with champions twain, through whom, because of what they did and said, the people who had strayed away returned.
O truly Joan, his mother, if it mean what it is said to, when interpreted!
Not for the world’s sake, for which men now toil, following the man of Ostia, and Taddéo, but for the love of spirit-food, so great a teacher did he shortly make himself, that he began to go about the vineyard, which withers soon, if idle be the vintner; and of the Chair, which to the righteous poor was formerly more kind, not through its own, but through the fault of him who, sitting there, degenerates, he asked not for the right to give or two or three for six, nor yet the income of the earliest vacancy, nor even the tithes, which to God’s poor belong; but leave to fight against the erring world for that seed’s sake, whereof plants twenty-four are girding thee. With doctrine thereupon, and will, to apostolic sanction joined, he started, like a torrent by a high source urged, and on all stocks heretical his onset smote, and ever there most strongly, where strongest the resistance was. From him there afterward flowed divers streams, wherewith the garden Catholic is watered so, that all the fresher are its tender shrubs. If such was one wheel of the Car, whereby the Holy Church, herself defending, won the civil struggle in her own domain, the other’s excellence should certainly be very plain to thee, concerning whom Thomas so courteous was, ere I appeared. And yet the rut, formed by the highest part of its circumference, so forsaken is, that there where crust was, now is mould. His household, which started out aright, and kept their feet upon his footprints, hath so turned around, that that which is in front now treads on what was once behind; and this will soon be seen by the bad culture’s harvest, when the tares will of their loss of granaries complain. And yet I say that one who, page by page, should search our book, would still some paper find, where he could read: ‘What I was wont to be, I am;’ but from Casale he’ll not come, nor yet from Acquasparta, whence such men approach the rule, that one evades, and one contracts its scope. Bonaventura’s life am I, of Bagnoregio, who in great positions set sinister cares behind. Here are Illuminàto and Aùgustin, who were among the first bare-footed poor, and, corded, made themselves the friends of God. Hugh of St. Victor here among them is, and Peter Mangiádor, and Peter of Spain, who in a dozen books still shines on earth; Nathan the prophet, and metropolitan Chrysóstom, Anselm, aye, and that Donatus, who to the first art deigned to set his hand; Raban is here; and at my side is shining the abbot of Calabria, Joachim, who with prophetic spirit was endowed. The flaming courtesy of brother Thomas and his discerning speech have moved me thus to celebrate so great a paladin, and with me likewise moved this company.”

Spirits of Theologians and Philosophers. Solomon’s Wisdom

Let him imagine, who would understand aright what now I saw, (and let him hold the image like a steadfast rock, the while I speak), the fifteen stars which vivify the sky at different points with such clear light, that vanquished is all denseness in the air; let him imagine next that Wain, whereto the bosom of our sky suffices so both night and day, that, as its pole revolves, it never disappears; and let him then imagine furthermore that trumpet’s mouth, which at the axle’s point begins, whereon the first wheel turns; and that all these had made two constellations of themselves, like that which Minos’ daughter fashioned when she felt the cold of death; and one to have its rays within the other, and both to so revolve, that one moved forward, and the other back; and he will of the actual constellation a shadow have, and of the double dance,
which circled round the place where I then was; for it as far surpasses our experience, as swifter than the Chiana moves the heaven which outspeeds all the others. There they praised nor Bacchus nor Apollo, but three Persons in one sole nature, the divine, and that, in but one Person with the human joined. The song and dance completed each its measure; whereat those holy lights gave heed to us, rejoicing thus to pass from care to care. And then the light, wherein the wondrous life of God’s dear pauper had been told to me, of those harmonious gods the silence broke, and said: “Whereas one straw has now been threshed, and as its seed hath now been stored away, sweet love inviteth me to beat the other. Thou think’st that in the breast from which the rib was drawn, which went to form the lovely cheek, whose palate cost so much to all the world, and that in that one which, before and after the lance had pierced it, made such satisfaction, as to outweigh all sins, whatever light our human nature is allowed, the whole, was by that Power infused, which made them both; thou, hence, art marvelling at what above I said, when I narrated that the good enclosed within the fifth light had no second. Ope now thine eyes to what I answer thee; and thou ‘lt see that my words and thy belief grow one in truth, as in a ring its center. That which dies not, and that which mortal is, are naught but that Idea’s reflected light, to which our Sire, by loving, giveth birth; for that Bright Light, which from its Lucent Source so flows, that It is not divided from Him, nor from the Love which with Them is intrined, out of Its goodness gathers up Its radiance, mirrored, as ‘t were, in nine subsistences, Itsself eternally remaining one. Thence to the lowest creatures It descends, from act to act, and such becomes, that naught It makes but brief contingencies; and these contingencies I understand to be those generated things the moving heavens produce by means of seed and without seed. Of these the wax, and that which mouldeth it, are not of one same kind; hence, underneath the ideal stamp, they more or less reflect it; it hence results that, after its own kind, one selfsame plant bears better fruit and worse; and that with different natures ye are born. If tempered to perfection were the wax, and if the heavens were at their height of power, the whole light of the seal would be revealed; but Nature, working as an artist dotth, who hath, though skilled and toward his art disposed, a trembling hand, e’er gives it with a flaw. Hence, if the Flaming Love dispose and stamp the Lucid Vision of the Primal Power, complete perfection is therein acquired.

Thus rendered worthy of an animal’s complete perfection was the earth of old; thus also was the Virgin rendered pregnant; hence thine opinion I as true commend, that human nature never was, nor will be, such as it once in those two persons was. And now, if I no further went, ‘How, then, could he be peerless?’ would thy words begin. But, that what seems not so may now seem clear, think who he was, and what the cause which moved him in his request, when ‘Ask’ was said to him. I have not spoken so, that thou shouldst not see clearly that a king he was, who asked wisdom to be a worthy king; and not to know the number of the Angels here; nor whether from a necessary premise, with one contingent, a necessity e’er followed as result; nor yet to know if a first motion needs must granted be, nor whether a triangle could be made, with no right angle, in a semicircle. Hence, if thou note both what I said and this, a royal wisdom is that peerless vision, on which the shaft of my intention strikes; and if to ‘hath arisen’ thou direct clear eyes, thou ‘lt see that it refers to kings alone, who many are, and few the good. With this distinction take thou what I said; for it can stand with that which thou believest of man’s first father, and of our Delight. And let this e’er be lead unto thy feet, to make thee, like one weary, slowly move to both the Yea and Nay thou seest not; for very low among the fools is he, who affirms without distinction, or denies, in one, as in the other, case; because it happens that a quickly formed opinion is often in a wrong direction turned; and then the feelings bind the intellect. For worse than vainly leaveth he the shore, who fishes for the truth and hath no skill, since, such as he set out, he comes not back; and in the world are patent proofs of this Parmenides, Melissus, Bryson, aye, and many who advanced, but knew not whither. So did Sabellius, Arius and those fools who to the Scriptures were as sword-blades are, in making faces crooked, which were straight. In judging, let not people be too sure, like him who in the field computes the ears, or ever they are ripe; for I have seen a thorn-bush seem all winter stiff and wild, and later bear a rose upon its top; and once I saw a vessel running straight and swiftly o’er the sea through all her course, and end by sinking at the harbor’s mouth. Let not dame Bertha or sir Martin think, on seeing one man rob, and one give alms, that they behold them as they seem to God; for that one may get up, and this one fall.”

In rounded vessels water moves from rim to center, and from center so to rim, according as one strikes it from without or from within. What I am saying here fell suddenly into my mind, when once the glorious life of Thomas ceased to speak, because of the resemblance which arose between his speech and that of Beatrice, who, after him, was pleased to speak as follows: “This spirit needs, although he tells you so neither by voice, nor ev’n by thinking it, to reach the root of still another truth. Tell him, then, if the light, wherewith your substance is flowering, will remain with you the same eternally as even now it is; and if it still remain so, tell him how, when ye have been made visible again, it can be such as not to hurt your sight.”

As when impelled and drawn by greater gladness, those who are dancing lift at times their voices, and give their actions greater sprightliness; so, at that prompt and reverent request, the holy circles showed new joyousness, both in their whirl and in their wondrous song. He that lamenteth that we die down here to live up yonder, hath not seen up there the comfort of the eternal rain. That One and Two and Three, who ever lives and reigns in Three and Two and One, uncircumscribed, and circumscribing everything, was there by each and all of yonder spirits sung with such a melody, that it would be a just reward for any one’s desert. And in the smallest ring’s divinest light I heard a gentle voice, like that with which, perhaps, the Angel spoke to Mary, answer: “As long as Paradise’s joy shall last, so long our love will radiate around it a garment such as this. Its clarity is patterned on our ardor, and our ardor upon our vision, and as keen is that, as is the grace it hath above its worth. When with our glorious and perfected flesh we’re clothed again, our persons will give greater pleasure, because of being all complete; wherefore, whatever freely given light the Good Supreme may grant us, will increase — a light permitting us to see Him; whence our vision needs must grow; and grow the ardor which from it is enkindled, and hence grow the radiance, likewise, which proceeds from this. But as a burning coal emits a flame, and by its vivid glow surpasses it, so that its own appearance is maintained; so will this brightness which surrounds us now be vanquished in appearance by the flesh, which still is covered by the earth; nor will so great a light avail to weary us, because our body’s organs will be strong for whatso’er is able to delight us.”

So quick and careful seemed both choirs to say ‘Amen!’, that clearly a desire they showed to have their buried bodies; and not, perhaps, for their own sakes alone, but for their mothers, and fathers and the others, who were dear to them, ere they became eternal flames. Then round us everywhere, of equal brightness, outside the luster there, another rose, like an horizon which is growing clear; and as new apparitions come in sight throughout the sky, at early evening’s rise, so that one’s vision seems, and seems not, true; meseemed that new subsistences I there began to see, and that a ring was forming outside the other two circumferences.

O thou true sparkling of the Holy Spirit! How suddenly and glowingly it flashed before mine eyes, which, vanquished, stood it not! But Beatrice revealed herself so fair and smiling, that this vision must be left ‘mong those that followed not my memory. I hence gained strength to raise mine eyes again; and with my Lady alone I saw myself borne to a higher grade of blessedness. I well perceived that I was higher up, by reason of the star’s enkindled smile, which ruddier seemed to me than is its wont. With all my heart and with that kind of speech...
which is the same in all, I made to God such holocaust as was befitting this new grace; and the ardor of my offered self had not yet been exhausted from my breast, when I perceived that sacrifice was welcome and pleasing; for to me there then appeared splendors between two rays, so bright and red, that I exclaimed: “O Helios, who dost so adorn them!” As the Galaxy, bedecked with smaller and with greater lights, so glimmers t’ween the world’s poles, that even the wise are led to doubt; thus, constellated in the depths of Mars, those rays described the honored sign, which in a circle quadrant-joinings make. My memory overcomes my genius here; because that Cross so lightened forth the Christ, that I can find therefor no fit example; but whosoever taketh up his cross and follows Christ, will pardon me again for what I leave, when in that glow he sees the Christ flash forth. Lights moved about from arm to arm, and t’ween the summit and the base, and sparkled brightly when they met, and when they passed each other. Thus we here see, straight and crooked, swift and slow, and ever renewing their appearance, particles of bodies long and short, as through a ray they move, whereby at times that shade is streaked, which folk, to shield them, make with skill and art. And as a viol or a harp, attuned with many strings, a pleasant tinkling makes for one by whom the music is not caught; so from the lights which there appeared to me, a melody was gathered through the Cross, which rapt me, though I made not out the hymn. I well perceived it was of lofty praise, because ‘Arise!’ and ‘Conquer!’ came to me, as to who heard, but did not understand. So much in love with it did I become, that naught had ever fettered me before with such sweet bonds. My words, perhaps, appear too bold, in that they lower set the pleasure giv’n me by the lovely eyes, looking in which my longing finds its rest; but who considers that the living seals of all fair things do more, the higher up, and that I had not there looked up at them, may pardon me for what, to be excused, I’m self-accused, and see that I speak true; for here the holy joy is not excluded, since, as it mounts, the purer it becomes.


The kindly will, wherein is always shown the love which is by righteousness inspired, as greed is in the evil will revealed, silence imposed on that sweet singing lyre, and caused those holy chords to be at rest, which Heaven’s right hand slackens, and draweth tight. How shall those substances to righteous prayers be deaf, who ceased from song with one accord, to give me the desire to pray to them? ‘T is well that he should boundlessly lament, who for the sake of that which lasteth not, deprives himself forever of that love. As through serene and quiet evening skies there darts from time to time a sudden fire, which startles tranquil eyes that were at rest, and seems to be a star which changes place; saving that naught is missing where it flashed, and that itself lasts but a little while; so, from the arm which to the right extends, down to that cross’s foot there ran a star drawn from the constellation shining there; nor from its ribbon did the gem depart, but through the radial band ran on, and looked like fire when back of alabaster moving. With like affection did Anchises’ shade reach forth, if our best Muse deserve belief, when in Elysium he perceived his son. “O thou my blood, O overflowing Grace of God, to whom, as unto thee, was e’er the Gate of Heaven unlocked a second time?” Thus spoke that light; hence I thereto gave heed; then to my Lady turning back my face, I was on this side and on that amazed; for such a smile was glowing in her eyes, that I with mine thought I had touched the depths
both of my grace and of my Paradise.

Thereat, a pleasure both to hear and see, the spirit joined to his beginning thing

I did not fathom, so profound his speech; nor did he hide himself from me by choice, but by necessity; for his conception set itself higher than a mortal’s aim.

And when the bow of his impassioned love had so relaxed its tension, that his words descended to the level of our mind, the first thing that was understood by me was “Blest be Thou, that, Trine and One, hast been so courteous to my seed!” And he went on:

“A pleasing and a long-protracted fast derived from reading in the Mighty Volume, wherein nor white nor dark is ever changed, hast thou relieved, my son, within this light in which I now address thee, thanks to her, who for the lofty flight hath feathered thee. Thou dearest that to me thy thoughts flow down from Him who Primal is, as from a one, if known it be, proceeds a five and six; yet who I am, thou dost not ask of me, nor wherefore I appear to thee more glad than any other in this joyous throng. Thou dearest what is true; because the small and great of this life at that Mirror gaze, wherein, before thou think, thou show’st thy thought. But that the holy love, wherewith I watch with sight perpetual, and which causes me to thirst with sweet desire, may be fulfilled the better, let thy voice, firm, bold, and glad, proclaim the will, proclaim the wish, whereto my answer has already been decreed!”

To Beatrice I turned, and she had heard before I spoke, and smiled a nod to me, which caused the wings of my desire to grow.

Then I thus: “When the First Equality revealed Himself to you, wisdom and love became for each of you of equal weight; because the Sun, whose heat and light illumed and warmed you, is of such equality, that all comparisons therewith are poor. But in the case of mortals, will and speech, because of reasons manifest to you, are differently feathered in their wings; hence I, who mortal am, now realize this inequality, and render thanks with heart alone to thy paternal greeting. I earnestly beseech thee, living topaz, set in this precious jewel like a gem, that with thy name thou make me satisfied. O thou my lea, in whom I pleasure took, for there, where love turns not aside, in Heaven

shouldst shorten by thy works his long fatigue. Florence, within the ancient ring of walls, from which she still receives her tierce and nones, sober and modest still, abode in peace. No bracelets had she then, nor coronets, nor dames with ornamented shoes, or belts more likely to be looked at than themselves; nor did a daughter frighten yet at birth her father; for her marriage-age and dowry outran in neither way due measure yet. No houses had she void of families; nor yet had a Sardanapalus come, to show us what could be achieved in halls. Not yet had Montemalo been surpassed by your Uccellatoio, which, outdated in its ascent, will be so in its fall. Bélincion Berti going gir I saw with bone and leather, and his lady leave her looking-glass without a painted face; and Nerli’s lord I saw, and the Del Vecchio’s with unlined skins contented, and their dames with spindle and with thread. O lucky women! Sure of her burial place was each, and none as yet deserted in her bed for France. One stayed awake, absorbed in cradle cares, and used, in comforting, the speech which forms a father’s and a mother’s first delight; another, from her distaff drawing flax, repeated for her household olden tales about the Trojans, Fiesole and Rome. As great a marvel then would a Calianghella, or Lapo Salterello have been held, as Cincinnatus or Cornelia now. To such a calm and beautiful town life, to such a safe community, to such a pleasant inn, did Mary, called aloud, give me; and at the same time I became within your ancient baptist’ry a Christian, and Cacciaiugda. Moronto was my brother, and Elisèo; from the Po’s valley came my lady to me, and from hër name thine was formed. The Emperor Conrad afterward I followed, and among his chivalry he belted me a knight, by my good deeds I so obtained his favor. In his train I went against that law’s iniquity, whose people, through your shepherds’ fault, usurps your jurisdiction. There by that vile folk was I released from that deceitful world, the love of which debases many souls, and from my martyrdom attained this peace.”

The Old and the New Population of Florence

O thou our small nobility of blood!
That thou shouldst make some people boast of thee down here, where languid our affections are, will never be to me a wondrous thing; for there, where love turns not aside, in Heaven
I mean, ev'n I myself was proud of thee. Thou truly art a cloak which soon grows short; so that from day to day, if thou be not patched out, time goes around thee with its shears. Hence with the "you," which Rome the first endured, and in whose use her race least perseveres, my words began again; whence Beatrice, who at a little distance from me stood, by smiling here, resembled her who coughed at the first fault ascribed to Guinevere. "You are my father," I began to say; "you to my speech complete assurance give; you so uplift me, that I'm more than I. My mind is by so many brooklets filled with joy, that it congratulates itself that, without breaking, it can stand the strain. Tell me, then, you my dear progenitor, who were your ancestors, and what the years which in your boyhood's time were chronicled; and tell me of the sheepfold of St. John, how large it was, and who were in it then, that in the highest seats deserved to sit."

As at the breathing of the winds a coal is quickened into flame, ev'n so I saw, at my endearing words, that bright light glow; and to mine eyes as fairer it became, so with a gentler and a sweeter voice, but not in this our modern form of speech, it said to me: "From that day on, when 'Hail' was uttered, to the child-birth when my mother, who now is sainted, was relieved of me who burdened her, this fire had to its Lion four hundred fifty and thirty times returned to light itself again beneath its paws. My first progenitors and I were born just there where first the town's last ward is found by him who runneth in your annual race. Let of my forebears this suffice to hear; for as to who they were, and whence came hither, silence is more commendable than speech.

All those that 'tween Mars's statue and the Baptist who at that time were able to bear arms, were but the fifth of those that live there now; but then its citizens, who now with men from Campi, Certàldo and Fighine mix, were in the lowest artisan seen pure. Oh, how much better it would be to keep as neighbors those to whom I here refer, and at Galluzzo and Trespiano mark our boundary, than have them in our town, and bear the stench of Aguglione's churl, and Signa's, who for graft hath sharpened eyes! If those who in the world are lowest fallen, had not step-mother-like to Caesar been, but kind, as to her son a mother is; one such is now a Florentine, and barters and trades, who would have turned to Semifonti, where formerly his grandsire mo...
will cut both more and better than will five.
If thou consider Luni and Urbisaglia
how they have gone, and how now in their wake
Chiusi and Sinigaglia go their way,
it will not seem or strange for thee or hard,
to hear how families degenerate,
since even cities have their term of life.
All your creations die, as well as you;
but death conceals itself in some that long
endure, while individual lives are short!
And as the turning of the lunar sphere
covers and bares earth’s shores without surcease,
e’v’n so doth Fortune deal with Florence; hence,
it should not seem a wondrous thing to thee
what I of those great Florentines shall say,
whose fame is hidden in the folds of time.
I saw the Ughi, and saw the Catellini,
Filippi, Greci, Ormanni and Alberichi,
though in decline, illustrious citizens;
and I, as great as they were ancient, saw,
with him of La Sanella, him of L’Arca,
the Soldanieri, Ardinghi and Bostichi.
Over the gate which is at present burdened
with recent felony of such great weight,
that there will soon be jetsam from the bark,
the Ravignani dwelt, from whom there sprung
Count Guido, and whoever since his time
hath noble Bellincione’s name assumed.
He of La Pressa knew already how
to rule; and Galigàio in his house
already had a gilded hilt and pummel.
Mighty already were the Column of the Vair,
Sachetti, Giuochi, Fifanti and Barucci,
the Galli, and those that for the bushel blush.
The stock whence the Calucci sprang was great
already; while already were the Sizii
and Arigucci raised to curule chairs.
And oh, how great I saw those now undone
through arrogance! Then, too, the golden balls
decked Florence forth in all her mighty deeds.
So likewise fared the ancestors of those,
who, when your church is vacant, always fatten
by staying in consistory together.
The haughty race, which like a dragon deals
with those that flee, and unto those that show
their teeth or purse, is peaceful as a lamb,
while I by Virgil was accompanied,
while I by Beatrice, and by the holy lamp,
under Foreknowledge and Freedom. Dante’s Exile and First Refuge
As that one came to Clyménè, who still
to sons makes fathers chary, to be sure
of that which he had heard against himself;
even such was I, and such was felt to be
by Beatrice, and by the holy lamp,
who first on my account had changed his place.
Wherefore my Lady said to me: “Express
thy wish’s ardor, so that it may issue
clearly impressed by its internal stamp;
not that our knowledge may the greater grow
by words of thine, but that thou mayst get used
to tell thy thirst, that we may pour thee drink!”
“O my dear root, that so dost lift thyself,
that, as terrestrial minds perceive that no
triangle holds two angles which are both
obtuse; thou, likewise, gazing at the Point
to which all things are present, dost perceive
contingent things, ere in themselves they are;
while I by Virgil was accompanied,
upward around the Mount which healeth souls,
and downward through the region of the dead,
great words were told me of my future life;
although, indeed, I feel myself foursquare
against the blows of fortune; my desire
would hence contented be, were I to hear
what kind of fortune is approaching me,
for slower comes an arrow when foreseen.”
Thus to that light I spoke, which had before
addressed me; and, as Beatrice had willed,
so was my wish confessed. Not in vague terms,
in which the foolish folk of old were wont
to get entangled, ere the Lamb of God,
who taketh sins away, was put to death,
but with clear words and unambiguous speech, that father’s love replied, which by its smile was both concealed and rendered manifest: “Contingence, which outside your matter’s volume doth not extend, is in the Eternal Vision wholly depicted; yet it taketh not necessity therefrom, save as a ship, while down a current moving, doth from eyes which mirror it. Therefrom, as from an organ sweet harmony attains one’s ears, the time which is for thee preparing strikes my sight. As through his false and cruel step-mother Hippolytus left Athens, so must thou leave Florence. This is willed already, this is sought, and soon will be achieved by him who meditates it there where every day Christ is both bought and sold. As usually, the blame will be imputed to the wronged in public outcry; but revenge for it will witness to the truth dispensing it. Thou shalt abandon all that thou hast loved with greatest tenderness; and of its shafts this is the one which exile’s bow shoots first. Thou shalt find out how salt another’s bread is wont to taste, and what a painful thing is going up and down another’s stairs. But what will bow thy shoulders most will be the bad and foolish company, with whom thou ‘lt fall into this vale; for all ungrateful, mad and malevolent will it become against thee; but soon thereafter, it, not thou, will have its forehead red with blood. Its deeds will furnish proof of its bestiality; hence well-becoming will it be for thee to have made thyself a party by thyself. Thy earliest refuge and first lodging-place shall be the courtesy of that great Lombard, who on the Ladder bears the holy Bird; and who will have for thee such kind regard, that ’tween you two, in doing and in asking, that will be first, which is with others last. With him the man thou ’lt see, who was, when born, so stamped by this strong star, that notable will be his deeds. By reason of his youth, the nations are not yet aware of him, for only nine years have these wheels revolved around him; but, before the Gascon cheat the noble Henry, sparks of his character will manifest themselves by disregard for money or for toil. And so well known will his munificence hereafter be, that ev’n his enemies will not be able to still their tongues at it. On him rely, and on his favors; many will be changed because of him, the rich and those that beg exchanging states; and written on thy mind shalt thou bear hence, but shalt not tell it,” — here he told me things incredible to those who shall be present. Then he added: “Son, glosses are these on what was said to thee; behold the snares which lie concealed behind not many circlings of the sun. And yet I would not have thee envious toward thy neighbors, because thy life far longer will extend than will the punishment of their bad faith.” When by his silence that blest soul had showed that he was through with weaving in the woof of that same web which I had given him warped, then I began, like one who, doubting, longs for counsel from a man who both perceives, wills righteously and loves: “I clearly see, my father, how toward me a time spurs on, that if the place which is to me most dear be taken from me, I lose not the rest by these my verses. Downward through the world whose bitterness is endless, and around the Mount, from whose fair top my Lady’s eyes have lifted me, and afterward through Heaven from light to light, things have I heard which, if repeated, will for many have the taste of bitter herbs; and yet, if I’m to truth a timid friend, I fear lest life I lose with those who shall of this age speak as ancient.” The light, wherein that treasure smiled, which there I found, sparkled at first, as in a sunbeam a golden mirror would; and then replied: “A conscience gloomy either with its own, or with another’s shame, will feel, indeed, the harshness of thy words; yet, none the less,
all falsehood having been removed from it, 
cause thy whole vision to be manifest, 
and where the itch is let the scratching be! 
For if, when tasted first, thy voice shall prove 
offensive, it will after leave behind it, 
when once digested, vital nourishment. 
This cry of thine will do as doth the wind, 
which strikes the loftiest summits most; and this 
will no slight honor prove. Hence only souls 
well known to fame were shown thee in these Heavens, 
upon the Mount, and in the woeful Vale; 
because the mind of him who hears rests not, 
nor strengthens its belief by illustrations 
based upon what is hidden and unknown, 
or by an argument that is not clear.”

18. The Fifth Heaven. Mars. The Spirits of Heroes 
The Sixth Heaven. Jupiter. The Happiness of Justice

That blessed mirror was enjoying now 
its thoughts alone, and I was tasting mine, 
tempering their sweetness with their bitterness; 
when that same Lady who was leading me 
to God, said: “Change thy thought; recall that near 
I am to Who unburdens every wrong.”
I turned me at my Comfort’s loving voice; 
and in her holy eyes what kind of love 
I then beheld, I here refrain from saying; 
not only since mine own words I distrust, 
but since my mind can not return so far 
above itself, unless Another guide it.
This only of that moment can I tell, 
that my affection, while I gazed at her, 
was freed from longing for all other things, 
as long as Joy Eternal, which directly shone 
on Beatrice, with its reflected aspect 
was from her lovely face contenting me. 
Conquering me with the splendor of a smile, 
she said: “Turn round and hark; for Paradise 
is not exclusively within my eyes.”
As our affection here is seen at times 
upon our countenance, if such it be that our whole spirit is thereby absorbed; 
so, in the flaming of the blest effulgence 
to whom I turned, I recognized his wish 
to have a little further talk with me. 
“In this fifth threshold of the Tree,” it then began, “which from its summit draws its life, 
always bears fruit, and never loses leaves, 
are blessèd spirits, who, before they came 
to Heaven, enjoyed so great a fame below, 
that every Muse would be thereby enriched. 
Gaze, therefore, at the Cross’s arms; and he, 
whom I shall name, will there perform the act, 
which in a cloud its own swift fire performs.”
I saw a splendor drawn along the Cross 
at Joshua’s name, the moment it was uttered, 
nor did I note the name before the deed. 
And at great Maccabaeus’ name, I saw 
another spirit whirling as he moved; 
and gladness was the whip that turned the top. 
Likewise, at Charlemagne’s and Roland’s names, 
your gaze intently followed two of them, 
as doth a falconer’s eye his flying bird. 
Then William afterward, and Renoart, Duke Godfrey next, and Robert Guiscard drew 
my sight along that Cross. And then, 
moving and mingling with the other lights, 
the soul which had addressed me, showed how great 
an artist’ among Heaven’s choristers he was. 
Round to my right I turned me to behold 
Beatrice my duty, signified 
by speech or act; and I beheld her eyes 
so joyous and so clear, that what she seemed 
surpassed her other and her latest wont. 
And as, because of feeling more delight 
in doing good, a man from day to day 
perceiveth that his virtue is increasing; 
ev’n so, on seeing that that miracle 
was fairer now, I noticed that the arc 
of my revolving with the heavens had grown. 
And as within a little space of time 
a lady turneth white, whene’er her face 
rids itself of the burden of its shame; 
such to mine eyes the change, when I had turned, 
through the white color of the temperate 
sixth star, which had received me in itself. 
I saw within that Jovial torch of light 
the sparkling of the love contained in it,
shaping our language forth before mine eyes;
and even as birds on rising from the shore,
as if in gratulation at the food they’ve found,
thus holy creatures in those lights were singing,
as here and there they flew, and with their forms
made of themselves now D, now I, now L.
Each singing to its note, they moved at first;
then, on becoming one of these same letters,
they stopped a little while, and silent kept.
O thou divine Pégâsean Muse, that glorious
doest make men’s genius, and dost render it
long-lived, as it through thee doth towns and realms,
so shed thy light on me, that I may here
describe their figures ev’n as I perceived them;
in these brief verses let thy power appear!
They then displayed themselves in consonants
and vowels five times seven; and as their parts
seemed to be said to me, I noted them.
Diligite Justitiam were first verb
and noun of all that was depicted there;
Qui Judicatis Terram were the last.
Then in the fifth word’s M they so remained
arranged, that Jupiter seemed silver there
pricked out with gold.
Other lights I saw
descend upon the summit of the M,
and rest there, singing, I believe, the Good
which draws them to Itself. Then, as when logs
are struck while burning, endless sparks fly up,
whence fools are wont to draw their auguries;
more than a thousand lights appeared to rise,
and upward move, some much, and some a little,
even as the Sun, which setteth them on fire,
allotted them; and when they quiet were,
each in its place, an Eagle’s head and neck
I saw portrayed by that outstanding fire.
He who paints there hath none to be His guide,
but is His own guide; and from Him derives
the instinct which is formative in nests.
The other blest ones, who at first appeared
content to form a Lily on the M,
go slow on to shape the Eagle’s form.
O gentle star, what and how many gems
proved to me that our justice here results
from that heaven’s influence which is gemmed by thee!
I therefore pray the Mind, wherein thy motion
and virtue start, that It may so regard
the source, whence comes the smoke which spoils thy
rays, that It may now a second time be wroth
with sale and purchase in that temple’s court,
whose walls were built with blood and martyrdom.
O soldiers of the heaven I contemplate,
pray ye for those that are on earth, all gone
astray behind the bad example there!
Well do I know that, even if in Heaven
Justice Divine makes of another realm
its looking-glass, yours apprehends it not
through any veil. Ye know with what attention
I gird myself to listen; and ye know
the doubt which is so old a fast for me.
And as a falcon, from his hood set free,
tosses his head, and, flapping his proud wings,
displays his eagerness, and plumes himself; such I beheld the symbol which is weaved by praises of the Grace Divine, become with songs, which who up there rejoices knows. It then began: “He who His compass turned around the world’s last verge, and in it parted its many hidden things from those revealed, was not so able to impress His Virtue on all the world, that His conceived ideal should not remain in infinite excess. And this assures one that the first proud being who greater was than all created spirits, through not awaiting light, untimely fell; it hence results that every lesser nature is but a scant recipient for the Good which hath no end, and measures Self by Self. Your vision, therefore, which must needs be one of that Mind’s rays, wherewith all things are filled, of its own nature cannot be so strong, that it should not perceive its Source as being far greater than is all that it can see. The vision, therefore, which your world receives, into Eternal Justice penetrates as doth an eye into the sea; because, though it perceive its bottom near the shore, when on the deep it sees it not; yet there it is, but its great depth conceals it. That is not light, which comes not from the Sky which never clouds itself; but rather darkness, a shadow of the flesh, or else its poison. Sufficiently disclosed to thee is now the hiding-place which once concealed from thee the Living Justice, which so frequently it was thy wont to question; for thou saidst: ‘A man is born upon the Indus’ banks, with no one there to speak of Christ, or read, or write; and all his actions and desires are good, as far as human reason sees, and without sin in either life or speech; then, unbaptized and without faith, he dies. Wherein consists the Justice which condemns him? Where is his fault, if he believeth not?’ Now who art thou, that as a judge would’st sit to judge of things a thousand miles away with the short vision of a human span? Surely for him who subtly strives with me, were not the Scriptures ruling over you, wondrous occasions would there be for doubt. O earthly creatures! O uncultured minds! The Primal Will, which of Itself is Good, ne’er from Itself, the Highest Goodness, moved. That much is just, which is therewith accordant; no good created draws It to itself, but It by radiating causes it.” As o’er her nest a stork moves circling round, after the feeding of her little ones, and as the one that ’s fed looks up at her; such did the blessèd shape become, which moved its pinions, by so many counsels urged, and, likewise, so did I lift up my brows. Wheeling around, it sang and said: “As now my notes to thee, that understand’st them not, such to you mortals is Eternal Justice.” When those bright flamings of the Holy Spirit had come to rest, still in the shape which caused the Romans to be honored by the world, “None to this Kingdom” it began again, “ever ascended without faith in Christ, either before, or after He was nailed upon the tree. But many, lo! shout ‘Christ!’ who at the Judgment shall be far less near Him, than will be such an one who knows not Christ; Christians like these the Ethiop will condemn, when parted shall the two assemblies be, one rich eternally, the other poor. What will the Persians to your rulers say, when lying open they shall see the Book, wherein all their dispraises are inscribed? There will be seen, among the deeds of Albert, that which ere long will move the pen, because hereby Prague’s kingdom will become a waste. There will be seen the woe, which on the Seine he who shall perish by a boar skin’s blow, bringeth about by falsifying coin. There will be seen the pride and thirsty greed, which makes the Scot and Englishman so mad, that neither can remain within his bounds. One will see there the easy life and lust of him of Spain, and of Bohemia, too, who neither of them knew, nor cared for, valor. One will see there, marked with a single I, the virtues of Jerusalem’s lame king, whereas an M will mark the contrary. One will see there the greed and cowardice of him who ruleth o’er the isle of fire, where once Anchises ended his long life. And, to explain his insignificance, his record will consist of shortened words, which in a little space will notice much. And there to each and all will be revealed the foul deeds of his uncle and his brother, who two crowns and a noble line disgraced. And he of Portugal, and he of Norway, will there be known, as also Rascia’s prince, who in an ill hour saw Venetia’s coin. O happy Hungary, if she no more shall let herself be wronged! Happy Navarre, if with her girding hills she arm herself! And both these should believe that Nicosia and Famagosta, as a proof of this, are wailing now, and raging at their beast, because he does not differ from the rest.”
When he who sheddeth light on all the world so far below our hemisphere descends, that daylight fades away on every side, the sky, once lighted up by him alone, is quickly rendered visible again by many lights, whereof one only shines; and I this happening in the sky recalled, when silent in the blessèd beak became the Standard of the world and of its leaders; for, brighter far, those living lights commenced songs which have fled and fallen from my mind. O thou sweet Love, that with a smile dost cloak thee, how ardent in those flutes didst thou appear, whose only breath was that of holy thoughts! After those precious and pellucid jewels wherewith I saw the sixth great light engemmed, had brought to silence their angelic chimes, I seemed to hear the murmur of a brook, which, flowing limpid down from rock to rock, reveals the abundance of its mountain-springs. And as a sound takes from a cittern’s neck its form, even as the air that enters it doth from the vent-hole of a shepherd’s pipe, so, all delay of waiting laid aside, that murmur of the Eagle mounted up along its neck, as if it hollow were. A voice it there became, and through its beak it issued forth in words, such as the heart whereon I wrote them down, was longing for. “That part of me which sees, and braves the sun, in mortal eagles,” it began again, “must now be looked upon attentively, for of the fires wherewith I shape me, those wherewith the eye is sparkling in my head, the highest are of all their ordered grades. He that as pupil in the middle shines, was once the singer of the Holy Spirit, who bore the Ark about from town to town; he now knows how deserving was his song, so far as it resulted from his will, by the reward proportioned to its merit. Of five that make a circle for my brow, the spirit nearest to my beak was he, who comforted the widow for her son; he now knows by his personal experience of this sweet life and of its opposite, how dear it costs one not to follow Christ. In the circumference of which I speak, he that comes next upon the rising arc, delayed his death by genuine repentance; he now knows that Eternal Justice brooks no change, whenever worthy prayers below to-morrow’s make of that which was today’s. The one who follows, with the laws and me, with good intentions which produced bad fruits, made himself Greek by ceding to the Shepherd; he now knows that the ill, from his good deed derived, is not a cause of harm to him, although thereby the world may be destroyed. He whom thou seest in the downward arc, the William was, for whom that country mourns, which weeps because its Charles and Frederick live; he now knows how Heaven loves a righteous king, and by his splendor’s glow reveals it still. Who in the erring world below would think that Rìpheus the Trojan was the fifth among the holy lights which form this curve? He now knows many of the things the world is impotent to see in Grace Divine, although his sight discerneth not its depths. Like a young lark which, as it soars through space, first sings, and then is silent, satisfied with the last sweetness which contented her; such seemed to me the image of the seal of that Eternal Pleasure, by whose will each thing becometh what it is. And though, with reference to my doubt, up there I was, as glass is to the color which it clothes, it could not bear to bide its time in silence; but by the very force of its own weight urged from my mouth the words, “What things are these?” whereat I saw a glorious feast of sparkling. Thereafter, with its eye the more enkindled, the blessèd Sign, in order not to keep me in wondering suspense, replied to me: “I see that thou believest all these things, because I say them, but dost not see how; and therefore, though believed in, they are hidden. Thou dost as one who fully knows a thing by name, but cannot see just what it is, unless another make it manifest. Regnum Coelorum suffers violence from burning love, and from a living hope, which vanquishes the Will Divine; though not as man o’ercometh man, but conquers it because it willeth to be overcome; and so, though vanquished, by its goodness wins. The first life in the eyebrow, and the fifth cause thee to be amazed, because therewith thou see’st the region of the Angels painted. They did not issue Gentiles from their bodies, as thou dost think, but Christians, with firm faith, one in the Feet that were to suffer, one,
in those that had. For one, to claim his bones, came back from Hell, where no one ever wills the good again; and this was the reward of living hope; of living hope which put its trust in prayers addressed to God to raise him, that thus his will might have a chance to act. The glorious soul I speak of, when the flesh had been regained, wherein he stayed not long, believed in Him, who had the power to help him; and through belief so warmed to genuine love, that he was worthy at his second death to come to this festivity. The other, through grace from so profound a spring distilled, that never hath the eye of any creature reached its first wave, set all his love below on righteousness; hence God, from grace to grace, to our redemption which is still to be, opened his eyes; he hence believed in it, and afterward endured no more the stench of Paganism; and for it he rebuked those who perverted were. And those three Ladies thou sawest at the right wheel of the Car, in lieu of baptism, were as sponsors for him more than a thousand years ere baptism was. O thou Predestination, how remote are thy foundations from the sight of those who do not see the First Cause as a whole! And ye, O mortals, keep yourselves in check, when judging men; for we, who God behold, know not as yet all those that are elect; and pleasant is such ignorance to us, because our good is in this good refined, that what is willed by God, we also will.” Thus, then, by that divinely pictured image, to make the shortness of my vision clear, a pleasant medicine was granted me. And as a skillful cither player makes the string’s vibrations follow a good singer, whereby the song acquires more power to please; even so, while it was speaking, I recall that both those blessèd lights I then beheld, as when, in winking, eyes concordant are, moving their flamelets to the Eagle’s words.


And now mine eyes upon my Lady’s face were fixed again, and therewithal my mind, which from all other objects had withdrawn. Nor was she smiling then; but: “Should I smile,” she said, addressing me, “like Sémélié wouldst thou become, when she to ashes turned; because my beauty, which along the stairs of this eternal palace brighter burns, as thou hast seen, the higher we ascend, is so resplendent that thy mortal strength at its effulgence, were it not restrained, would be as is a bough which lightning rends. Up to the seventh splendor we are raised, which now beneath the burning Lion’s breast is raying downward mingled with his strength. Intently fix thy mind behind thine eyes, and cause them to be mirrors of the figure which in this mirror will appear to thee.” He that should know what, in the blessèd face, the nature of my vision’s pasture was, when I transferred me to another care, would know, since one was outweighed by the other, how gladly I obeyed my heavenly Guide. Within the crystal which, as round the world it whirls, bears its illustrious leader’s name, under whose rule all wickedness lay dead, colored like gold whereon a sun-beam shone, a Ladder I beheld, which so high up ascended, that my eye pursued it not. I saw, moreover, coming down its steps so many glowing splendors, that I thought that every star seen shining in the sky had been poured out of it. And even as daws, as is their natural wont, when day begins, together move to warm their chilly plumes; and then without returning some fly off, and some go back to whence they started first, while others, whirling in a circle, stay; such was, it seemed to me, the fashion here within the sparkling throng which came together, whene’er they met upon a certain round; and that which nearest to me there remained, became so bright, that in my thoughts I said: “I clearly see the love thou showest me.”
But she, whence I await the how and when of silence and of speech, keeps still; hence I, against my will, do well by asking naught. She, thereupon, who in the sight of Him who seeth everything, my silence saw, said unto me: “Appease thy warm desire!” And I began: “My merit doth not make me worthy of thy reply; but, for the sake of her who granteth me the right to ask, make known to me, blest life that art concealed in thine own joy, the cause which draweth thee so closely to my side; and tell me why that gentle symphony of Paradise is silent in this wheel, which down below sounds so devoutly through the other spheres.” “Thy hearing is as mortal as thy sight;” it answered me; “there is no singing here because of that which hinders Beatrice from smiling. Down the holy Ladder’s steps have I so far descended, but to give thee a welcome with my words and with the light which mantles me; nor hath a greater love caused me to be more ready; for as much or more love burns up yonder, as those flames reveal to thee; but that great charity which makes us ready servants of the Counsel which rules the world, allotst here, as thou seest.” “I well perceive, O holy lamp,” said I, “how that free love is in this court enough for following the Eternal Providence; but this is what seems hard for me to see, why thou alone among thy consorts here need help to prop them, help — they weigh so much! — to guide, and help to hold them up behind. They cover so their palfreys with their cloaks, that two beasts walk beneath a single hide. O Patience, that dost tolerate so much!” More flamelets at these words I saw descend from step to step, and round this flame they came, and having stopped, caused each of them to grow more beautiful; More flamelets at these words I saw descend from step to step, and whirl; and every whirl caused each of them to grow more beautiful; and round this flame they came, and having stopped, uttered so deep a cry, that none could here resemble it; nor did I understand its words; its thunder overcame me so.


Oppressed with stupor, to my Guide I turned, as would a little child who always runs for help to where he most confides; and she, as doth a mother who at once assists her pale and breathless offspring with her voice, whose wont to worship only gives it up.”

“Twen Italy’s two seashores cliffs arise, not very far from thine own native place, so high, that thunders peal much lower down; and form a lofty ridge called Càtria, ’neath which a hermitage is consecrate, whose wont to worship only gives it up.” He thus began for me his third address, and then, continuing, said: “To serving God I there became so steadfastly devoted, that, feeding upon olive juice alone, I readily endured both heat and cold, and was with thoughts contemplative content. That cloister’s wont it was to yield these heavens abundant fruit; but it hath now become so empty, that its state must soon be known. In that place I was known as Peter Damian; and Sinning Peter in Our Lady’s House I was, upon the Adriatic shore. But little mortal life remained to me, when I was sought, and forced to take the hat, which always passes on from bad to worse. Lean and barefooted Cephas came, and then, the Holy Spirit’s mighty Vessel came, eating the food of any hostelry; our modern shepherds now on either side need help to prop them, help — they weigh so much! — to guide, and help to hold them up behind. They cover so their palfreys with their cloaks, that two beasts walk beneath a single hide. O Patience, that dost tolerate so much!” More flamelets at these words I saw descend from step to step, and whirl; and every whirl caused each of them to grow more beautiful; and round this flame they came, and having stopped, uttered so deep a cry, that none could here resemble it; nor did I understand its words; its thunder overcame me so.
for many illustrious spirits shalt thou see, if, as I tell thee, thou direct thine eyes.

Mine eyes I then directed as she pleased, and saw a hundred little spheres which, gathering, by mutual rays each other fairer made.

Like one I was, who checks within himself the goad of his desire, and dares not ask, so great his fear lest he may ask too much.

The largest and most lustrous of those pearls came forward thereupon, to sate my wish concerning it. Within it then I heard:

“If thou, as I do, couldst behold the love which burns among us here, thy thoughts would be expressed; but lest, by waiting, thou delay thy lofty aim, I’ll answer now the thought which causes thee to so restrain thyself.

That mountain on whose slope Casino stands, was once frequented on its top by folk, who both deluded were and ill-disposed.

And he am I, who first up yonder bore the name of Him, who carried down to earth the truth which here exalteth us so much; and such abundant grace upon me shone, that I withdrew the neighboring villages from that vain worship which seduced the world.

These other fires were all contemplatives, men who were kindled by the heat which brings the flowers and fruits of holiness to birth.

Here is Macarius, Romuald is here, and here are those my brethren, who remained in cloisters, and who steadfast kept their hearts.”

And I to him: “The affection shown by thee, in talking with me, and the kindliness I see and note in all your burning flames, have opened wide my trust, even as the sun dilates the rose, whene'er its petals ope as widely as they can. Because of this I pray thee, father; do thou, then, inform me if I am worthy to receive such grace, as to behold thee with thy face unveiled.”

Then “Brother,” he replied, “thy great desire in the last sphere above shall be fulfilled, where all thine others are, and mine as well. Every desire is perfect there, mature and whole; in that sphere only is each part where it has always been; for it is not in space, nor turns on poles, and up to it our Ladder reaches; and because of this it steals itself away beyond thy ken. Jacob, the patriarch, beheld it stretch thus far its upper portion, when of old laden with Angels it appeared to him. But from the earth, to climb it, no one now removes his feet, and my monastic rule remains but as a means of wasting paper. Walls which of old an abbey used to be, have now become the dens of thieves, and cowls are sacks now, filled with naught but wretched meal.

But heavy usury doth not rebel against God’s will, as much as doth the fruit which renders so insane the hearts of monks; for, whatsoever the Church may hold in trust, is all for those that ask it in God’s name, and not for relatives, or what is worse. So soft the flesh of mortals is, that good beginnings do not last as long below, as from an oak’s until its acorn’s birth. Peter began with neither gold nor silver, and I, with prayers and fasts began my convent, as Francis, with humility, did his. And if thou look at each of these beginnings, and then consider whither each hath run, thou 'lt see that what was white hath turned to brown. Jordan turned backward, and the water fleeing when God so willed, were much more wonderful to see, in fact, than succor would be here.”

He thus addressed me; to his company thereat returning, they together closed; then, like a whirlwind, all were upward rapt. The gentle Lady up that Ladder’s rounds urged me behind them by a sign alone, her virtue so o’ercame my natural weight; nor here below, where one goes up and down by natural law, was motion e’er so swift, as to be equal to my pinions’ flight. So may I, Reader, once again return to that celestial triumph, for whose sake I oft bewail my sins and smite my breast; thou hadst not drawn away and put thy finger as quickly into fire, as I beheld the sign which follows Taurus, and was in it. O glorious stars, O light, that pregnant art
with mighty virtue, from which I acknowledge all of my genius, whatsoe'er it be; with you was born, and in your midst was hiding he who is father of all mortal life, when first I breathed the Tuscan air; and then, when grace had been bestowed upon me here to enter that high wheel which turns you round, your region was the one allotted me. To you my sighing soul devoutly prays, that it may now acquire the power it needs for that hard task, which draws her to itself.” “To Ultimate Salvation thou art now so near,” in answer Beatrice began, “that clear should be thine eyes, and keen their sight. Therefore, ere further thou in-it thyself, look downward, and behold how great a world I have already set beneath thy feet; so that thy heart, as joyous as it can, may show itself to that triumphant thro' which happy comes through this ethereal sphere.” Then with my vision I returned through one and all seven spheres, and this globe I beheld such that its mean appearance made me smile; hence that opinion I approve a best which deems it least; and just may he be called, who sets his thought on something else. Latona's daughter I enkindled saw without the shadow which was once the cause of my believing her both rare and dense. The countenance, Hyperion, of thy son I here sustained; and saw how near to him both Maia and Dione round him move. And after this, the temperance of Jove appeared to me, between his son and sire; and clear the reason for their change of place. All seven of them were thus revealed to me, how great they are, how swift, and far apart in their abodes. The little threshing-floor which maketh us so fierce, was as a whole revealed to me, from hills to river-mouths, while I was circling with the eternal Twins. Back to the lovely eyes I then turned mine.


Even as a bird, among the leaves she loves, settles upon the nest of her sweet brood throughout the night, which hides things from our eyes, and then — that she may see their longed for looks, and find the food wherewith to nourish them, in doing which she deems hard work a pleasure — comes forth betimes upon an outer branch, and gazing steadfastly with burning love, waits for the sun till break of dawn; so stood my Lady, toward that region turned intent, 'neath which the sun appears to show least haste; hence I, on seeing her absorbed in thought, became like one who, yearning with desire for other things, contents himself with hope. But little time elapsed between each 'when,' I mean from when I waited, till the sky I saw grow more and more suffused with light. Then Beatrice exclaimed: "Behold the hosts of Christ's victorious triumph, and all the fruit ingathered by the circling of these spheres!" To me her countenance seemed all on fire, and so replete with happiness her eyes, that I must pass without describing them. As, when in cloudless skies the moon is full, Trivia among those nymphs eternal smiles, who deck with light the whole expanse of heaven; so I, above a thousand thousand lamps, beheld a Sun which kindled one and all, as our sun kindles all the stars on high; and through the living light the Shining Substance was so transparent, and so brightly shone upon my face, that I endured it not. O Beatrice, thou dear and gentle Guide! "That which o'erwhelms thee is a Power," she said, "against which nothing can defend itself. This is the Wisdom, this the Virtue is, which opened wide the road 'tween Heaven and earth, which was in olden times so long desired." As fire is liberated from a cloud, when so dilating that it finds no room, and falls, against its nature, to the earth; even so my mind, as it became enlarged among those viands, issued from itself; but what it then became, can not recall. "Open thine eyes, and see what now I am! Such things hast thou perceived, that thou art now equipped with power to look upon my smile." I was like one who, when aroused from sleep, is of a dream aware which he forgets, and tries in vain to bring it back to mind, when I had heard a bidding which deserves such gratitude, that never from the book which holds past records will it be effaced. If now, to help me, all those tongues should speak, which Polyhymnia and her sisters fed most richly with the sweetest of their milk, the thousandth portion of the truth would not be reached, ev'n though they sang the holy smile, and how it lighted up the holy face; hence, painting Paradise, the sacred Poem must leap like one who finds his path cut off. But none, who to its weighty theme gave thought, and to the mortal shoulder bearing it, would blame it, should it tremble 'neath its load. No waters for a little boat are these, my daring plow goes cleaving on its way, nor for a pilot who would spare himself. "Why doth my countenance enamor thee so much, that to the garden beautiful thou turnest not, which blooms beneath Christ's rays? Here is the Rose, in which the Word Divine became incarnate; here the Lilies are,
render the loftiest sphere by entering it."

The circling melody thus closed itself as with a seal; and all the other lights made Mary’s name resound. The royal robe of all the convolutions of the world, which burneth most, and by the breath and ways of God is quickened with the greatest life, had its internal shore so far above us, that, where I was, its semblance was not yet revealed to me; mine eyes, hence, could not follow the Flame which, crowned, behind its Offspring rose.

And as a child, who, having had its milk, stretches its little arms up toward its mother, urged by the love which outwardly flames forth; thus each of those white spirits with its flame stretched up in such a way, that its deep love for Mary was made manifest to me.

Thereafter they remained there in my presence, singing ‘O Queen of Heaven’ so tenderly that its delight hath never left me since.

Oh, how abundant is the store heaped up in those most wealthy coffers, which were once good husbandmen for sowing seed below!

Here, living on it, they enjoy the treasure, which, weeping in their exile, they acquired in Babylon, where gold was left untouched.

Here triumphs, subject to the Exalted Son of God and Mary, in His victory, together with the councils old and new, he who of such great glory holds the Keys.

24. The Eighth or Starry Heaven. The Twins St. Peter examines Dante on Faith

“O Fellowship elected to the banquet of that Blest Lamb, who feedeth you so well, that ever sated is your appetite; since, by the grace of God, this man enjoys a foretaste of what falleth from your table, or ever death have set his time for him, heed his immense desire, and on him shed a little of your dew! Ye from the Source forever drink, whence cometh what he thinks.”

Thus Beatrice; thereat those happy spirits arranged themselves in spheres on steady poles, emitting brilliant flames, as comets do. And ev’n as wheels within the works of clocks so turn, for one who heeds them, that the first seems quiet, while the last appears to fly; even so, since at a different speed they whirled, those carol-dances, whether swift or slow, permitted me to estimate their wealth.

From that one which I deemed of greatest beauty, I saw a fire so happy issue forth, that none it left of greater brightness there; then around Beatrice it turned three times with so divine a song, that even my fancy repeats it not for me; and so my pen takes a leap forward, and I write it not;
for our imagination, much more speech, too bright a color is to paint such folds.

“O holy sister mine, who so devoutly dost pray to us, thou, by thine ardent love, withdrawest me from yonder lovely sphere.”

When once at rest again, that blessed fire turned toward my Lady with his voice, which spoke as I have said. And she replied to him:

“O thou eternal life of that great man, to whom of this great joy our Lord bequeathed the Keys which He brought down; test thou this man as pleases thee, on questions light and grave pertaining to the Faith, which formerly enabled thee to walk upon the sea. If well he love, well hope, and well believe, is not concealed from thee, because thy sight is thither turned where all is seen depicted; but since this Realm hath through the true Faith won its citizens, ‘t is well that, to its glory, it should befall him now to speak of it.”

Even as a bachelor equips himself — nor speaks, until the master states the question — to furnish proofs, but not decide the same; so I, while she was speaking, armed myself, with every proof, that I might ready be for such a questioner, and such confession.

“Speak now, good Christian, and declare thyself; What, then, is Faith?” Thereat I raised my brow toward the bright light from which these words were breathed; and then I turned around toward Beatrice, and she by rapid signals bade me pour the water forth from my internal fount.

“The Grace which grants that I confess myself before the first Centurion,” I began, “cause my conceptions to be well expressed.” And I continued: “As the truthful pen of thy dear brother, Father, who with thee set Rome upon the right way, wrote of it, Faith is the substance of the hoped for things, and the evidence of those that are not seen; this seems to me its essence.” Then I heard: “Thou thinkest right, if well thou understand why with the substances he placed it first, and with the evidences afterward.” Thereat I answered: “Those deep truths which here are freely making themselves known to me, from eyes down yonder are so far concealed, that their existence lies in Faith alone, and thereupon the lofty Hope is based; it, therefore, takes the nature of a substance; and from this Faith one needs must syllogize without the help of any other sight; it, therefore, assumes the nature of an evidence.” And then I heard: “If thus were understood all that for doctrine is acquired below, there’d be no room there for the sophist’s mind.” These words were breathed from that enkindled love, which added then: “Already have this coin’s alloy and weight been very well examined; but tell me if thou hast it in thy purse.” I, therefore: “Yes, so shining and so round, that nothing in its coinage makes me doubt.” Then issued from the deep light shining there: “Whence did this precious jewel come to thee, wherein all virtues else are based?” And I: “The abundant showers of the Holy Spirit, outpoured upon the parchments old and new, a syllogism have formed, which prove it true so clearly to me, that, all other proofs seem inconclusive when compared with it. “The Ancient Premise and the New,” I then heard asked, “which so conclusive are to thee, why dost thou take them for the word of God?” And I: “The proof which showeth me the truth, are those great works which followed, works for which Nature ne’er heated iron, nor anvil smote.” Then I was answered: “Say what makes thee sure that those works e’er occurred? The very thing which calls for proof, none other, tells thee so.” “If to Christianity the world was turned,” I said, “unhelped by miracles, then this is such, that not a hundredth are the rest; for thou didst poor and fasting go afield, to sow the goodly plant, which was of old a vine, and now has turned into a thorn.”

This ending thus, the high and holy Court resounded through the spheres a “God we praise!”
sung to the melody they sing up there. That Baron then, who thus from branch to branch had tested me, and now had led me on, until the final leaves were drawing near, began again: “The Grace which with thy mind holds loving converse, hitherto hath oped thy mouth as it should be; hence I approve of that which it hath uttered; but it now behooves thee say what thou believest in, and whence it has been offered to thy faith.”

“O holy father, spirit that dost now behold what thou didst so believe, that thou didst outrun toward the tomb far younger feet,” I thus began, “thou’st have me now reveal the essential part of my sincere belief, and thou dost also ask the cause of it. And I reply: In One God I believe, Sole and Eternal, who, Himself unmoved, moves all the heavens with Love and with Desire; and I, for so believing, have not only proofs physical and metaphysical, but that truth also yieldeth me its proof, which hence rains down through Moses, psalms and prophets, and through the Gospel, and through you, who wrote after the Flaming Spirit made you shepherds. And I believe in three Eternal Persons, and these to be one Essence, so both one and trine, that they can be conjoined by are and is. Of the divine profound estate whereto I now refer, the teaching of the Gospel sets many times the seal upon my mind. This is the fountain-head, and this the spark, which after spreads into a living flame, and in me glows, as stars do in the sky.”

As when a lord, hearing what pleases him, rejoices in the news his servant brings, and takes him to his arms, when he is silent; so, giving me his blessing as he sang, that Apostolic light, at whose command I spoke, when I had ceased, thrice girdled me; so greatly had I pleased him by my words.

25. The Eighth or Starry Heaven. The Twins Triumphant Spirits. St. James examines Dante on Hope

If e’er it happen that the Sacred Poem, to which both Heaven and earth have so set hand, that it hath made me lean for many years, o’ercome the fierceness which against me bars the lovely fold, where as a lamb I slept, though hostile to the wolves that give it war; then, with another voice and other fleece a Poet I’ll return, and at the font of mine own baptism take the laurel crown; for there I entered first into the Faith, which makes souls known to God, and Peter later, because of my belief, thus wreathed my brow. Then toward us, after this, there moved a light out of the sphere, from which the first-fruit issued, which of his vicars Christ once left behind; and, full of joy, my Lady said to me:

“Look, look! Behold the Baron, for whose sake men go to see Galicia down on earth!”

As, when a dove alighteth near its mate, each, by its circling and its cooing, shows the other its affection; thus I saw one great and glorious Prince the other greet, and praise the food which sateth them up there. But when their mutual gratulations ceased, before me each in silence stopped, and flamed so brightly, that my face was forced to bow. Then, smiling, Beatrice: “Illustrous life, by whom the generous liberality of our basilica was once described, let Hope resound upon these heavenly heights; thou know’st that thou didst stand for it, as oft as Jesus showed most brightness to the three.”

“Lift up thy head, and reassure thyself; for all that cometh from the mortal world up hither, must be ripened in our rays.”

This comfort reached me from the second fire; hence to the hills I raised mine eyes, which erst had bowed them down by their excessive weight.

“Since, of His Graciousness, our Emperor wills that thou, before thy death, shouldst face His Counts in His most secret hall; that, having seen the truth in this our court, thou mayst confirm, both in thyself and other souls, the Hope, which rightfully enamors men on earth; say what it is, and how therewith thy mind is blossoming, and whence it came to thee.”

Thus, further, did the second light proceed. And that kind soul who to so high a flight had led the feathers of my wings, forestalled my answer thus: “No child of greater hope hath the Church Militant, as in the Sun.
is written, which irradiates all our band, it, therefore, hath been granted him to come from Egypt to Jerusalem, and see, or e'er the period of his warfare end. Thine other two requests, made not for knowledge, but so that he may carry back with him to what extent this virtue pleases thee, I leave to him, for they will not be hard for him, nor matter for self-praise; to these let him reply, and may God's Grace assist him." Even as in that wherein he expert is, a pupil readily and willingly answers his teacher, that his worth be shown; "Hope is" I said, "a steadfast expectation of future glory, which by Grace divine and by preceding merit is produced. This light from many stars comes down to me; but he into my heart instilled it first, who was the Greatest Leader's greatest bard. For "Let them hope in Thee, that know Thy Name!" the latter in his theody declares, and, if he have my faith, who knows it not? Then, thou with his instilling, didst so greatly instill that hope in me with thine epistle, that, filled with it, I pour your rain on others." While I was speaking, in the living bosom of that great fire, a bright effulgence quivered quickly and often, like a lightning-flash; and then it breathed: "The love wherewith I still warm to the virtue which once followed me, till with the palm I issued from the field, would have me give my breath to thee again, that dost therein delight; and I am pleased to have thee say what promise Hope affords thee."

And I: "The Scriptures, both the new and old the goal establish of the souls whom God hath made His friends; this points it out to me. Isaiah says that each in his own land will in a double garment be arrayed; and his own land is this sweet life of ours; and, in a more explicit way, thy brother makes this same revelation manifest to us, where of the snow white robes the treats." After these words had ended, first was heard above us, "Let them hope in Thee," whereto all of the carols made reply; and then a light became so brilliant in their midst, that, if the Crab had such a crystal star, winter would have a month of one sole day. And as a happy maiden, rising, goes, in honor of the bride, to join the dance, and not for any failing on her part; even so I saw the splendor, brighter grown, approach the two, who in a wheel were turning, as it behooved the arbor of their love. Into the song and music then it entered; and on the three my Lady kept her gaze, silent and motionless as would a bride. "This is the one who on His breast reclined, who is our Pelican, and from the Cross selected was, to hold the filial office."

Even thus my Lady spoke; but no more after did her words withdraw her eyes from fixed attention, than before. Even as is he, who gazes at the sun, and tries to see it partially eclipsed, and who, because of seing, growth blind; such I became before that latest fire, till this was said: "Why dost thou blind thyself, to see a thing which hath no being here? Earth is my body on the earth, and there will with the others stay, until our number shall with the eternal purpose correspond. With both their garments in the blessed cloister are those two Lights alone, which hither rose; and this shalt thou take back unto your world." Stilled was the flaming circle at these words, and with them that sweet mixture which was formed out of the music of the threefold breath, as, from fatigue or danger to escape, oars, which had stroked the water just before, are at a whistle's sound all brought to rest. Ah, how disturbed in mind I then became, when I turned round to look at Beatrice, because I could not see her now, though close to her I was, and in the happy world!

26. The Eighth or Starry Heaven. The Twins

St. John examines Dante on Love. Adam

While I was frightened by my loss of vision, from the refulgent flaming which had quenched it, a breath, which caused me to give heed, came forth, and said: "Till thou regain the sense of sight which thou hast spent by gazing up at me, 't is well that thou make up for it by speech. Therefore begin to speak; and say toward what thy soul aspires, and also bear in mind that sight in thee is lost, but not destroyed; because the Lady who is leading thee through this divine expanse, hath in her look the power possessed by Ananias' hand."

"At her own pleasure, soon or late," I said, let the cure reach the eyes which portals were, when with that fire she entered, wherewithal I ever burn. The Good which sates this court is alpha and omega of all scriptures Love reads to me in tones or low or loud." And that same voice which rid me of the fear the sudden blinding blaze had given me, inspired me with a wish to speak again, and said: "Thou surely through a finer sieve must pass thy meaning; it behooves thee say who toward so great a target turned thy bow." And I: "By philosophic arguments, and by authority which from up here descends, must such a love needs stamp itself on me; because the good, when understood as such, enkindles love, and all the greater love, the more it holds of goodness in itself.
Hence to that Being who so perfect is,
that every good which lies outside of Him
is nothing but a beam of His own radiance,
more than to any other must the mind
in love be moved, of all who recognize
the truth on which this argument is based.
He to mine understanding shows this truth,
who demonstrates to me the Primal Love
of all the sempiternal substances;
the Truthful Author’s voice revealeth it,
when, speaking of Himself, He saith to Moses:
“All goodness shall I have thee see.’ Thou, too,
revealdest it to me when thou beginnest
the loud announcement which o’er other trumps
heralds on earth the secrets of this state.”

Thereat I heard: “By human understanding,
and by authorities therewith concordant,
the sovereign of thy loves is turned to God.
But further say if other cords thou feel
attract thee toward Him; so that thou mayst say
how many of love’s teeth are biting thee.”
Not hidden was the purpose of Christ’s Eagle;
nay, rather, I perceived to what he wished
to lead my love’s profession to declare;
thus, “All those bitings” I began again,
“which possibly could turn one’s heart to God,
have with my love of Him concurrent been;
for, both the world’s existence, and mine own,
the death which He endured that I might live,
and that which all the faithful hope as I,
with the mentioned living knowledge,
and set me on the shore of righteous love.
I love the several leaves wherewith enleaved
is all the garden of the Eternal Gardener,
according to the good He giveth each.”
As soon as I had ceased, a most sweet song
throughout all heaven resounded, and my Lady
said: “Holy, Holy, Holy!” with the rest.
And ev’n as at a vivid flash of light
one wakes from sleep, because one’s visual power
turns toward the ray which moves from coat to coat;
and as the one awakened shrinketh back
from that which he hath seen, so senseless is
his sudden waking, till reflection helps;
thus Beatrice drove all motes from mine eyes
by the mere radiance of her own, whose light
shone further than a thousand miles away;
I, therefore, saw far better than before;
then, since I was amazed at it, I asked
about a fourth light I beheld with us.
My Lady then: “In yonder radiant light
the first soul which the first Power e’er created
is gazing joyfully upon his Maker.”
Even as a bough which, while the wind is passing,
bends its top down, and then uplifts itself,
by innate strength which raises it again;
even so did I, amazed, while she was speaking;
and then the wish to speak, wherewith I burned,
made me feel reassured, and I began:
“O fruit that wast alone produced when ripe,
O ancient Father, thou to whom each bride
is both a daughter and a daughter-in-law,
I beg thee as devoutly as I can
to speak to me; thou seest my wish, hence I,
that I may quickly hear thee, tell it not.”
At times a covered animal so stirs,
that its own movement needs must be revealed,
because its covering corresponds to it;
so likewise did the first of souls display
to me, through that which covered it, how gladly
he came to give me pleasure. Then it breathed:
“Without its being told to me by thee,
better do I perceive what thou desirest,
thou perceivest what thou knowest best;
for I behold it in the Truthful Mirror,
which of Itself makes other things a likeness,
though naught makes It a likeness of itself.
Thou fain wouldst hear how long it is since God
in that high garden placed me, where this Lady
prepared thee for so long a flight of stairs;
how long it was a pleasure to mine eyes;
the real occasion for the mighty wrath;
and what the tongue, which I both used and made.
Now, son, the tasting of the tree was not
itself the cause of such a banishment,
but only the transgression of the bound.
In that place, whence thy Lady started Virgil,
I, hence, for this assembly longed four thousand
three hundred revolutions of the sun
and two; and him I saw return again
to all his highway’s lights nine hundred times
and thirty, while I still abode on earth.
The tongue I spoke had quite extinct become
a long time e’er the people under Nimrod
attempted their unfinishable task;
for never was a product of man’s reason
apt to endure, for human appetite
renews itself according to the heavens.
That mankind speaks, a work of Nature is,
but if in this or that way, Nature then
leaves you to do according to your pleasure.
Ere I descended to the grieving place
below, the Highest Good, from whom proceeds
the joy which swathes me, was on earth called I;
EL was He called thereafter; this must be,
for human custom is, as on a bough
a leaf, which goeth as another comes.
Upon the Mount which highest from the sea
ascends, I lived, in innocence and sin,
from the first hour until the one which follows,
after the sun’s first quadrant change, the sixth.”

27. The Eighth or Starry Heaven. St. Peter’s Invective
The Ninth Heaven. Primum Mobile. The Angelic
Hierarchies

“Glory to Father, Son and Holy Ghost!”
all Paradise in such a way began,
that its sweet song intoxicated me.
What I was seeing seemed to me a smile
as of the Universe; for through both sight
and hearing my intoxication entered.
O joy! O gladness inexpressible!
O life by love and peace completely filled!
O wealth no longer longed for, but assured!
Before mine eyes the torches four remained
on fire, and that which was the first to come,
began to grow more luminous; and such
in its appearance it became, as Jove
would come to be, if he and Mars were birds,
and interchanged the plumage of their wings.
The Providence, which there above assigns
both turn a
nd office, silence had imposed
upon the blessèd choir on every side,
when “If I change my color, marvel not”;
I heard him say, “for ev’n while I am speaking,
shalt behold all these change color, too.
He who on earth usurps my place, my place,
which in the sight
of God’s own Son
is vacant, of my burial ground hath made
a sewer of blood and stench; whereby the Pervert,
who fell from hence, is there below appeased.”
The whole of Heaven I then beheld o’erspread
with that same hue which colors clouds both morn
and evening, when the sun lies opposite;
and as a modest lady, who feels sure
of her own self, but at another’s fault,
on merely hearing of it, timid grows;
so Beatrice changed her appearance then,
and such as hers, I think, was Heaven’s eclipse,
what time the Sovereign Power suffered pain.
Thereat his words proceeded in a voice
so changed from what had been its wonted self,
that his appearance had no further changed:
“The Bride of Christ was not by my blood fed,
nor by the blood of Linus, nor by that
of Cletus, to be used for gain of gold;
but for the winning of this happy life,
both Sixtus, Pius, Urban and Calixtus
after much lamentation shed their blood.
’T was not our purpose that upon the right
of our successors one part of the folk
of Christ should sit, and on the left another;
nor that the Keys bestowed in trust on me,
should on a banner come to be an emblem,
and warfare wage on those that were baptized;
nor I become an image on a seal
for privileges venal and deceptive,
which often make me blush and flame with wrath.
Rapacious wolves disguised in shepherds’ clothes
are seen in all the pastures from up here.
Vengeance of God, why art thou quiet still?
Men of Cahors and Gascons even now
prepare to drink our blood. O good b
eginning,
to what vile ending thou art doomed to fall!
But that high Providence, which saved for Rome,
through Scipio’s help, the glory of the world,
will quickly succor her, as I conceive;
and thou, my son, who, for thy mortal weight
art to return below,
open thy mouth,
and hide not that which I do not conceal!”
Ev’n as our atmosphere lets fall great flakes
of frozen vapor, when the horn of heaven’s
she-Goat is in conjunction with the sun;
so I beheld the sky grow beautiful
and upward flaked with those triumphant flames
which for a while had sojourned with us there.
My sight was following their forms, and followed,
till the mid space, by reason of its vastness,
prevented it from passing further on.
Thereat the Lady who had seen that freed
I was from gazing up, said: “Lower now
thine eyes, and see how far thou hast revolved.”
I saw that since the hour when I had first
looked downward, I had moved through all the arc
the first of climates makes from mid to end;
past Cadiz, hence, Ulysses’ insane track
I saw, and nearly to the seashore where
Europa made herself so sweet a load.
And of this little threshing-floor, much more would have been shown me; but the sun was circling beneath my feet, a sign or more removed. And my enamored mind, which in my Lady always takes pleasure, more than ever now was burning to restore mine eyes to her. And if or art or Nature e’er made baits in human flesh or in its painted forms, to catch men’s eyes, and capture thus their minds, they all together would seem naught, compared to that divine delight which on me shone, when to her smiling face I turned around; the virtue, therefore, which that look vouchsafed, removed me from fair Leda’s lovely nest, and urged me on into the swiftest heaven. Its nearest and its most exalted parts are all so uniform, I cannot tell which Beatrice selected as my place. But she who saw my wish began to speak, and smiled so happily, that God appeared to be rejoicing in her countenance:

“The nature of the world, which quiet holds the center, and around it moves the rest, beginneth here as from its starting-point. And this heaven hath no other ‘where’ than in the Mind Divine, where kindled is the Love which turns it, and the Power itself rains down. One circle’s Light and Love encircle it, as it the other heavens; and He alone this precinct understands, who girdeth it. Its motion is not measured by another, but all the others are by this, as ten is measured by its half and by its fifth. And now how time in such a flowerport can have its hidden roots, and in the rest its leaves, hereafter can be manifest to thee.”

O thou Cupidity, that ‘neath thyself dost sink all mortals so, that none avails out of thy waters to withdraw his eyes! The will in human beings blossoms well, but constant rains turn into blighted fruit the genuine plums. And faith and innocence are found in children only, but take flight, before their cheeks are covered up with hair. While still a prattler, one observeth fasts, who later, when his tongue is free, devours, under whatever moon, whatever food; and one who, while still lisping, loves and harkens to his mother, later on when speaking well, would see her in her grave. Thus in the Primal Sight becometh black the white face of the lovely child of him, who brings the morn and leaves the eventide. And that thou marvel not at this, recall that there is none on earth who rules; and hence the human family goes thus astray. And yet ere January’s month become wholly unwintered, through the hundredth part neglected there below, these upper spheres shall roar so, that the storm so long foreseen will turn the sterns to where the prows are now, so that the fleet will run its course aright, and good fruit follow on the blossom’s flower.”


After the truth against the present life of wretched mortals had been shown to me by her who lifts my mind to Paradise, as in a mirror he perceives its flame, who from behind is lighted by a torch, before he has it in his sight or thought, and turns around to notice if the glass have told the truth, and sees that it accords therewith, as with its music’s time a song; so likewise now my memory recalls that I did, as I gazed in those fair eyes, whence Love had made a cord to capture me. And as I turned around, and mine were touched by that which in that sphere becomes apparent, whene’er one looks intently at its center, a Point I saw, which rays out light so keen that eyes which it enkindles needs must close by reason of its great intensity; and any star that from down here seems smallest, would seem to be a moon, if set beside it, as at each other’s side the stars are set. Perhaps as near as e’er a halo seems to gird the light around, which colors it, when densest is the air which gives it form; a ring of fire was whirling round the Point so swiftly, that it would have overcome the motion which most quickly girds the world; and by another this was gilt around, that by a third, as this one by a fourth, then by a fifth the fourth, and by a sixth the fifth. The seventh came next, outside of these so widely spread, that Juno’s messenger, full circled, were too narrow to contain it. Like these the eighth ring and the ninth; and each more slowly moved, as in its order’s number it whirled at greater distance from the first; and that one had the clearest flame of all, whence the Pure Spark least distant was, because, I think, it most in-truths itself therein. My Lady, who profoundly lost in thought beheld me, said to me: “On yonder Point Heaven and the whole of Nature are dependent. Look at the circle most conjoined to It; and know thou that it moves so rapidly because spurred onward by its burning love.” And I to her: “If ordered were the world as I perceive it is in yonder wheels, what is before me set had sated me; but in the world of sense all revolutions may be perceived to be the more divine as from the center they are more remote; hence, if my longing is to be appeased
in this mirific and angelic temple, whose only boundaries are light and love, 't is fit that I hear further why the example and its exemplar do not correspond; for by myself I think on this in vain."

"No wonder is it, if for such a knot thy fingers insufficient are, so hard hath it become, through lack of being tried!"

My Lady thus; she then continued: "Take what I shall tell thee, wouldst thou sate be; and on it subtly concentrate thy mind. The embodied circles wide or narrow are, according to the more or less of virtue distributed through all their several parts. A greater goodness makes for greater weal; a greater body greater weal bespeaks, if all its parts are perfect equally. Hence that which with itself sweeps onward all the universe remaining, corresponds to yonder circle which most loves and knows. If, then, thou stretch thy measure round the virtue, not round the appearance, of the substances which seem arranged in circles to thy sight, thou 'lt see a marvelous conformity of more to larger and of less to smaller, in every heaven, to its Intelligence." Even as the hemisphere of air remains resplendent and serene, when Boreas blows out of the cheek, from which he mildest proves, whereby the fog which troubled it before, is cleansed and cleared, until the welkin smiles upon us with the charms of all its wards; even such did I become, when once my Lady had with her clear reply provided me, and, like a star in heaven, the truth was seen. And when her words had ceased, not otherwise doth iron when still boiling scintillate, than yonder circles sparkled. Every spark followed its Kindler; and so many were they, that their whole number far more thousands counts, than ever did the doubling of the chess. From choir to choir I heard Hosanna sung to that Fixed Point which holds them at the 'where,' and ever will, where they have always been. And she who in my mind my doubtful thoughts was seeing, said: "The primal rings have shown the Seraphs to thee, and the Cherubim. Thus swiftly do they heed their bonds, to make them as like the Point as may be, and as like It they can be, as their vision is sublime. Those other loves that round about them move, Thrones of the Countenance Divine are called, and for this reason end the primal triad. And thou shouldst know that all of them are happy, according as their vision plumbs the Truth, wherein all understanding is at rest. From this it may be seen how blessedness is founded on the faculty which sees, and not on that which loves and follows after; the measure of this vision is the merit, which both of Grace and of good will is born; such, then, is their advance from grade to grade. The second triad which, like that above, produces buds in this eternal spring, whose foliage no nocturnal Aries spoils, sings endlessly its vernal song of praise to three sweet melodies, which sound in three orders of joy, wherewith it trines itself. Three goddesses are in that hierarchy; the Dominations first, the Virtues next; the third one is the Order of the Powers. Then, in the last two dancing choirs but one, with Principalities Archangels whirl; the last is wholly of Angelic Joys. All these Angelic orders upward look, and downward so prevail, that all to God attracted are, and all in turn attract. And Dionysius with such great desire gave himself up to contemplate these orders, that he both named and graded them as I; but with him, later, Gregory disagreed, and hence, as soon as ever in this heaven he oped his eyes, at his own self he smiled. Nor would I have thee wonder that on earth a mortal should disclose a truth so secret, for he who saw it here, revealed it to him, with many other truths about these rings."

29. The Ninth Heaven. Primum Mobile. The Angelic Hierarchies. The Creation, the Nature and the Number of the Angels

When, by the Ram and by the Scales surmounted, both children of Latona make together a girdle of the earth's horizon line, as long as from the moment when the zenith holds them in equipoise, till from that girdle both free themselves by changing hemisphere; only so long did Beatrice keep silent, a smile her face adorning, as she gazed intently on the Point which vanquished me. She then began: "I tell, but do not ask, what thou art fain to hear, for I have seen it where every Where and every When is fixed. Not for the gain of good unto Himself, which is not possible, but that His Splendor might in resplendency declare 'I AM,' in His Eternity, outside of time, out of all limits else, the Eternal Love, as pleased Him, in new loves disclosed Himself. Nor yet ere this did He remain inert, for neither after nor before, occurred God's going to and fro upon these waters. Both form and matter, simple and conjointed, came into being which had no defect, even as three arrows from a three-stringed bow; and as in glass, in amber or in crystal, a ray so shines, that from the time it comes till its completion, is no interval; thus from its Lord did that triform effect
ray forth into its being all at once, without distinction as to its beginning. Order was concreate, and for the substances ordained; and highest in the world were those in whom activity was brought forth pure. Pure potentiality the lowest place assumed; and 'tween these two so strong a bond activity and potentiality conjoined, that never will it be unbound. Jerome concerning Angels wrote for you that their creation was an age-long tract of time before the remnant world was made; but written is this truth in many places by writers of the Holy Ghost; and there thou 'lt see it, if but carefully thou look; and reason, too, sees this to some extent, for it could not acknowledge that the Motors could be so long deprived of their perfection. And now thou knowest where and when these loves created were, and how; hence in thy longing three ardors have already been extinguished. Nor, counting, would one reach as far as twenty, as quickly as a portion of the Angels disturbed the lowest of your elements. The rest remained; and with such great delight began the art, which thou beholdest here, that never from their circling have they ceased. The Fall's occasion was the cursed pride of him, whom thou didst see oppressed by all the burdens of the world. Those whom thou here beholdest, modest were, and recognized themselves as from that Goodness sprung, which apt had made them for such great intelligence. And therefore by illuminating Grace, and by their merit, was their sight so raised, that now a full and steadfast will is theirs. Nor would I have thee doubt, but be assured, that to receive God's Grace is meritorious, according as affection opes to it. And now concerning this consistory, much canst thou contemplate without more help, if thou hast apprehended well my words. But seeing that on earth throughout your schools men teach that such the Angelic nature is, that it both understands, recalls and wills, I'll further speak, that thou the simple truth mayst see, which there below confounded is, because the doctrine taught equivocates. These substances, e'r since the face of God first gladdened them, have not withdrawn their eyes therefrom, whence nothing is concealed. They have no vision which is interrupted, therefore, by objects new to them, and hence need not remember by divided thought; folk, therefore, dream down there, though not asleep, some thinking that their words are true, some not; but greater is the latter's sin and shame. And ye down yonder follow not one path, when ye philosophize; so much doth love of show, and being famed for it, transport you. And yet with even less disdain is this endured up here, than when the Holy Scripture is set aside, or turned to wrong account. No one considers there how much it costs to sow it in the world, or how much he, who humbly clings to it, gives pleasure here. Each strives to call attention to himself, making his own inventions; these are taught by preachers, while the Gospel's voice is stilled. One says that while the Christ was suffering death the moon turned back, and interposed herself; and hence the sun's light failed to reach the earth; others that of its own accord the light concealed itself, hence its eclipse affected Spaniards and Hindoos, as it did the Jews. Florence hath not so many Lapi and Bindi as fables such as these, which all year long are shouted from the pulpits everywhere; hence the poor sheep, who do not know, return from pasture fed on wind; nor doth the fact that they see not that they are harmed, excuse them. Christ did not say to His first company: "Go and preach idle stories to the world!" but gave them a foundation for the truth; and that alone found utterance from their lips; therefore, when striving to enkindle faith, they used the Gospel as their shield and lance. Men now go forth to preach with jests and tricks, and so, if but a hearty laugh is raised, the cowl puffs up, and nothing more is asked. But in its tail there nestles such a bird, that if the crowd perceived it, it would see what that forgiveness is, in which it trusts; therefore such folly hath increased on earth, that without proof or other attestation, to any kind of promise men would flock. Saint Anthony is fattening thus his pig, and others also fouler far than his, by paying money void of coinage stamp.
But since a great digression we have made, turn thine eyes backward to the straight road now, that thus our way be shortened with our time. This nature so exceedingly extends in number, that there never was or speech, or mortal thought, that could extend so far. And if thou look at that which is disclosed by Daniel, thou wilt see that in his ‘thousands’ no well determined number is revealed. The Primal Light, which rays out on it all, is in as many ways therein received, as are the lights wherewith It pairs Itself; hence, since affection follows on the act which understands, love’s sweetness is therein burning or warm in different degrees. And now see how exceeding high and broad is that Eternal Worth, which makes Itself so many mirrors, whereupon It breaks, while in Itself, as erst, remaining One!" 


The sixth hour glows perhaps six thousand miles away from us, and now our world inclines its shadow to a nearly level bed; mid-heaven the while, which lies so deep above us, is growing such, that now and then a star is lost to our perception here below; till, as the brightest handmaid of the sun advances further, star by star, the sky, even to the fairest, closes to our view. Not otherwise the Triumph, which forever plays round about the Point which vanquished me, and seems contained by what Itself contains, little by little faded from my sight; my seeing nothing, therefore, and my love forced me to look again at Beatrice. If what has hitherto been said of her were all included in a single praise, but little would it serve my present turn. The beauty which I then beheld, transcends not us alone, but truly I believe its Maker only can enjoy it all. And herewith I confess myself o’erwhelmed more than a tragic or a comic poet was ever by a crisis in his theme; for as the sun the sight that trembles most, so the remembrance of her lovely smile deprives my memory of its very self. From the first day when I beheld her face in this life, till this present sight of it, I’ve never ceased from following her in song; but now must my pursuit desist from tracing her beauty’s progress further in my verse, as at his utmost every artist must. Such, as I leave her to a louder cry than that of mine own trump, which draweth now its arduous matter to its closing, she, with a quick leader’s mien and voice, resumed: “We now have issued from the greatest body into the Heaven which is itself pure Light; Light intellectual which is full of Love, Love of true Goodness which is full of Joy; Joy which transcendeth every kind of Pleasure. Here both the soldiery of Paradise shalt thou behold, and one in that array, which at the Final Judgment thou shalt see.” Like a quick lightning-flash which scatters so the visual faculties that it prevents the eye’s reacting to the brightest objects; ev’n so a living Light around me shone, and left me swathed about by such a veil of its effulgence, that I lost my sight. “The Love which calms this last heaven always welcomes into its midst by greetings such as this, and thus adapts the candle to the flame.” No sooner had these few brief words of hers attained mine inner ear, than I perceived that I was being raised above my powers; hence, with new sight I so rekindled me, that there cannot exist so bright a light that now mine eyes could not endure to see it. Light in a River’s form I then beheld, which glowed refulgently between two banks, adorned with wondrous hues of early spring. And from this River issued living sparks, which settled everywhere among the flowers, and looke[d] like rubies set in gold; and then, as if intoxicated by its odors, into the wondrous River plunged again, another coming out, if one went in. “The deep desire which now inflameth thee, and urges thee to know what thou art seeing, the better pleases me, the more it grows. But of this water it behooves thee drink, before so great a thirst as thine is slaked.” So said to me the Sunlight of mine eyes. “The River and the topaz lights, which come and go,” she added, “and the smiling grass
are prefaces foreshadowing their truth; not that imperfect in themselves they are, but that deficiency exists in thee, because thy sight is not yet strong enough."

There is no little child that turns its face so quickly toward its milk, on waking up much later than hath been its wont, as I, to make far better mirrors of mine eyes, leaned over toward the Stream which only flows that we therein may be the better made. Soon as mine eyelids' eaves had drunk of it, it seemed to me transformed from long to round; and then, like folk who under masks have been, and different seem from what they were before, when once divested of the alien looks, wherein their self had disappeared; ev'n so the flowers and sparks had changed themselves for me into a feast far greater, so that clearly I now beheld both Courts of Heaven revealed. O Splendor of my God, whereby I saw the exalted Triumph of the Realm of Truth, give me the power to tell what I perceived! There is a Light up yonder, which allows its Maker to be seen by every creature which only hath its peace in seeing Him; and in a circle's form it spreadeth out to such extent, that its circumference would be too broad a girdle for the sun. Its whole appearance from a ray proceeds reflected from the summit of the First Moved Sphere, which from it takes its life and potency. And as within the water at its base a hill reflects itself, as if to see its slopes adorned, when rich with leaves and flowers; thus, ranged above and all around the Light, mirrored on o'er a thousand tiers I saw all that of us have yet returned up there. And if the lowest row within itself gathers so great a light, how great must be this Rose's width in its remotest petals? Nor did my vision of its breadth or height lose itself in them, but embraced the whole extent and inmost nature of this Joy. There near, nor far, nor add, nor take away; for there where God unmediated rules, in no way doth the natural law obtain. Into the yellow of the Eternal Rose, which outward spreads in tiers, whose fragrance praises the Sun which makes an everlasting spring, was I, like one who, fain to speak, keeps silent, led on by Beatrice, who said to me: "Behold how vast the white robed Convent is! Behold how wide the circuit of our Town! Behold our benches so completely filled, that few are now the people longed for here! On that great seat, whereon thine eyes are fixed by reason of the crown which rests there now, or e'er thou sup at this our wedding feast, shall sit the soul, august to be below, of that great Henry who shall come to set Italia straight, ere she shall be prepared. The blinding greed which now bewitches you hath made you mortals like a child, who, though he die of hunger, drives his nurse away. And in the sacred Forum such an one shall Prefect be, that he'll not go one road with him, in open or in covert ways. But in his holy office he will not be long endured by God; for hurled he'll be where Simon Magus is for his reward, and deeper down shall thrust Alagna's man."


In semblance, therefore, of a pure white Rose the sacred soldiery which with His blood Christ made His Bride, revealed itself to me; meanwhile the other host, which, flying, sees the glory of Him who wins its love, and sings the goodness which had made them all so great, was, like a swarm of bees, which now inflowers itself, and now returns to where its toil is sweetened, ever coming down to enter the spacious Flower, which with so many leaves adorns itself, and reascending thence to where its Love forever makes His home. The faces of them all were living flames, their wings were golden, and the rest so white, that never is such whiteness reached by snow. When down into the Flower they came, they spread from bench to bench the peace and ardent love, which by the fanning of their sides they won. Nor did so vast a host of flying forms between the flower and that which o'er it lies, hinder the sight, or dim the splendor seen; because the Light Divine so penetrates the Universe, according to its worth, that naught can be an obstacle thereto. And this secure and joyous Kingdom, thronged
by people of the ages old and new, 
wholly on one Mark set its looks and love.
O Trinal Light, that in a Single Star, 
sparking before their eyes, dost so appease them, 
look down upon our tempest here below!
If the Barbarians — coming from a region, 
above which Helicë looms every day, 
while circling with the son who is her joy, 
on seeing Rome and all her lofty buildings, 
what time the Lateran rose eminent
o'er every mortal thing — were wonderstruck;
how overwhelmed with awe must I have been, 
I, who from human things, to things divine, 
from time, into eternity had come, 
from Florence — to a people just and sane!
Because of this, indeed, and of my joy, 
it pleased me to be mute and hear no sound.
And ev'n as in the temple of his vow, 
when hoping to describe it all is cleared; 
ev'n so, while wandering through the living Light, 
I turned mine eyes on all the graded ranks, 
circling now up, now down, and now around.
There love-persuasive faces I beheld, 
decked by Another's light and their own smiles, 
and gestures fraught with grace and dignity.
My look now as a whole had comprehended 
the general form of Paradise, but had not yet 
settled especially on any part;
and I was longing with rekindled wish 
to ask my Lady as to many things, 
concerning which my mind was in suspense.
Though one thing I had meant, another answered; 
thinking to look at Beatrice, an elder 
I saw arrayed as are the glorious folk.
His eyes and cheeks were all suffused with joy 
and kindliness, and such his pious mien, 
as fitting is a father's tenderness.
Hence "Where is she?" I said impulsively; 
and he: "To bring thy longing to an end, 
was I by Beatrice from mine own place 
withdrawn; and if upon the highest rank's 
third round thou look, thou shalt again behold her enthroned where her deserts allotted her."
Without reply I lifted up mine eyes, 
and saw her, as, reflecting from herself 
the eternal rays, she made herself a crown.
Not from the tract whence highest thunders peal 
is any mortal eye so far removed 
from whatsoever sea it fathoms most.
as Beatrice was distant from mine eyes; 
but naught was that to me, because her face 
came down to me unblurred by aught between.
"O Lady, thou in whom my hope is strong, 
and who for my salvation didst endure 
to leave the traces of thy feet in Hell, 
I recognize the virtue and the grace 
of all the many things which I have seen, 
as coming from thy power and kindliness.
From slavery to freedom thou hast drawn me 
in every way, and over every path, 
within thy power to achieve that end.
Guard thou in me the fruitage of thy bounty, 
that thus my soul, restored to health by thee, 
may, when it leaves my body, please thee still!"
I thus implored; and she, though so far off 
she seemed, looked down at me and smiled; 
then to the Eternal Fount she turned again.
Thereat the holy elder said: "That thou 
mayst bring thy journey to its perfect end, 
for which both prayers and holy love have sent me, 
hover about this Garden with thine eyes, 
for to have seen it will prepare thy look 
to rise still higher through the Ray Divine.
The Queen of Heaven, for whom I wholly burn with love, will grant us this and very grace, 
for I her faithful servant Bernard am."
As he who from Croatia comes, perchance, 
to look at our Veronica, and who, 
because of its old fame, is never sated, 
but says in thought, as long as it is shown:
"My Lord, Christ Jesus, God in very truth, 
was, then, your countenance like unto this?"
even such was I, as on the living love 
I gazed on him, who in this world received 
a taste, in contemplation, of that Peace.
"This glad existence, son of Grace," he then 
began, "will not be known to thee, if fixed 
at this low level only are thine eyes.
Look at the circles, to the most remote, 
till yonder thou behold that Queen enthroned, 
to whom devoutly subject is this Realm."
I raised mine eyes; and as at early morn 
the horizon's eastern parts excelled in light 
the regions where the sun is setting; so, 
as with mine eyes from vale to mount I moved, 
I saw a region at the utmost verge 
vanquish in light all other parts before me.
And as the skies where one awaits the car 
which Phaethon badly drove, more brightly gleam, 
while pale the light on either side becomes; 
so likewise, brilliant in the middle loomed 
that peaceful Oriflamme, and on each side 
the fire in equal measure burned less bright.
And clustered there with wings outspread I saw 
more than a thousand Angels jubilant, 
and each distinct in splendor and in speed; 
while smiling down upon their sports and songs 
a Beauty I beheld, who was the joy 
within the eyes of all the other Saints.
And even if I in utterance were as rich 
as in imagination, I 'd not dare 
attempt to tell the least of its delight.
When Bernard saw mine eyes intent on 
the object of his ardent love, 
he turned to it his own with such affection, 
that mine more eager grew to look again.
Intent on his delight, that contemplator
the office of a teacher took unasked,
and thereupon began these holy words:
“The one so beautiful at Mary’s feet
is she who opened and who made the wound,
which Mary closed again, and then anointed.
In the order which up there the third seats make,
Rachel beneath her sits with Beatrice,
as thou perceivest. Sarah, Rebecca, Judith,
and she who was that singer’s ancestress,
who said when he was grieving for his sin:
“Have mercy on me,” thou canst thus behold
downward from rank to rank, as each I name,
and through the Rose decline from leaf to leaf.
Descending from the seventh row of seats,
even as above it, Hebrew women follow,
dividing all the tresses of the Flower;
for in accordance with the attitude
their faith assumed toward Christ, these women form
the wall which separates the sacred steps.
On this side, where full-bloomed the Flower is,
complete with all its leaves, are seated those
who in the Christ that was to come believed;
and on the other, where the semicircles
are interrupted by still vacant seats,
are those who faced toward Christ already come.
And as on this side here the glorious throne
of Heaven’s own Lady, and the other seats
beneath it, such a great partition make;
so, opposite, the seat of that great John,
who, ever holy, underwent the desert
and martyrdom, and then two years in Hades;
while Francis, Benedict and Augustine
beneath him were decreed to form the line
with others down to here, from round to round.
And now behold how great God’s foresight is;
for each of these two aspects of the Faith
will fill this Garden to the same extent.
And know that downward from the row of seats,
which midway separates the two divisions,
no one is seated for his own deserts,
but for another’s, under fixed conditions;
for all of these are spirits who were freed
before they had the power to really choose.
This by their faces thou canst well perceive,
and by their childish voices furthermore,
if, looking at them well, thou listen, too.
Thou doubtest now, and, doubting, thou art silent;
but I will set thee free from that strong bond
wherein thy subtle thoughts are holding thee.
Within the ample nature of this Realm
nothing can any more occur by chance,
than either sadness, thirst or hunger can;
for in accordance with eternal law
is settled all thou seest, so that here
close-fitting to the finger is the ring.

These people, therefore, who before their time
have reached true life, are not without good cause
more excellent, or less, among themselves.
The King, through whom this Kingdom finds repose
in such delight and love, that no one’s will
is bold enough to long for any greater;
creating all minds in His own glad sight,
as Him it pleases, dowers each with Grace
divers ways; here let the fact suffice.
And this is clearly and expressly marked
for you in Holy Scripture by those twins
who in their mother had their wrath aroused.
According to the color of the hair
of that Grace, therefore, must the Light supreme
be worthily accorded as a crown.
Without deserving aught, then, for their deeds,
are these to different grades assigned, which differ
in their innate keen-sightedness alone.
The faith of parents only was, indeed,
with innocence, enough for their salvation,
throughout the centuries of early times.
Then, when the primal ages had elapsed,
males were by circumcision forced to win
the virtue needed by their guileless wings;
but later, when the age of Grace had come,
without the perfect baptism in the Christ,
such innocence was there below retained.
But now look at the face which to the Christ
is most resemblant; for its light alone
can make thee ready to behold the Christ.”
I saw such gladness raining down on her,
borne by those holy minds, created such
that they might fly across those altitudes, that whatsoever I had seen before ne’er held me with such admiration poised, nor showed me such resemblance unto God.

And that same love which first descended there, “Ave Maria, Gratia plena,” singing, spread out his open wings in front of her. And on all sides the beatific Court made such an answer to the song divine, that every face became the more serene.

“O holy father, who for me dost bear to be down here, and leave the pleasant place, where by eternal lot thou hast thy seat, who is that Angel who with such delight is at our Queen’s eyes gazing, and is so enamored, that he seems to be on fire?”

For teaching I had thus recourse again to him who was from Mary drawing beauty, as from the sun the early morning star. And he to me: “As much self-trust and grace as can be in an Angel or a soul, are all in him; and we would have it so; for he it was who carried down the palm to Mary, when God’s Son upon Himself was pleased to take the burden of our flesh. But with thine eyes now follow after me, as I keep speaking; and note the great Patricians of this most just and kind Imperial State. The two that have the happiest seats up there, because the nearest to Augusta’s throne, are, as it were, the two roots of this Rose. He that upon the left is at her side, that Father is, because of whose bold taste the human species tastes such bitterness; and on her right thou see’st that ancient Father of Holy Church, to whom Christ gave in trust the Keys of this fair Flower. And he who saw, ere dying, all that fair Bride’s troubled days, beside him sits; and at the other’s side that Leader rests, ‘neath whom the ingrate folk, stiff-necked and fickle-minded, lived on manna. Anna thou seest sitting opposite to Peter, so content to see her daughter, that never from her doth she move her eyes, although ‘Hosanna!’ singing; o’er against the oldest Father of a family Lucia sits, who had thy Lady go, when thou thy brows in downward flight didst turn. But since apace thy slumber-time is fleeing, here will we pause, as that good tailor does, who cuts his gown according to his cloth; and toward the Primal Love direct our eyes, that, looking toward Him, thou mayst penetrate as far into His Splendor as thou canst.

”O Virgin Mother, Daughter of thy Son, humbler and loftier than any creature, eternal counsel’s predetermined goal, thou art the one that such nobility didst lend to human nature, that its Maker scornd not to make Himself what He had made. Within thy womb rekindled was the Love, through whose warm influence in the eternal Peace this Flower hath blossomed thus. Here unto us thou art a noonday torch of Charity; and down below ‘mong mortal men, thou art a living fount of Hope. Lady, so great thou art, and hast such worth, that one who longs for Grace, and unto thee hath not recourse, wingless would wish to have his longing fly. Not only doth thy Kindliness give help to him that asketh it, but many times it freely runs ahead of his request. In thee is Mercy, Pity is in thee, in thee Magnificence, and all there is of Goodness in a creature meets in thee. Now doth this man, who from the lowest drain of the Universe hath one by one beheld, as far as here, the forms of spirit-life, beseech thee, of thy grace, for so much strength that with his eyes he may uplift himself toward Ultimate Salvation higher still.

He then began the following holy prayer:

33. The Empyrean. GOD. St. Bernard’s Prayer to Mary The Vision of God. Ultimate Salvation

“That from my words thy heart turn not aside.”

“The first seemed to reflect the Next like a Rainbow, And the third was like a Flame ADAMISO 33

Paradiso 33

The Empyrean. GOD. St. Bernard’s Prayer to Mary

The Vision of God. Ultimate Salvation

“O Virgin Mother, Daughter of thy Son, humbler and loftier than any creature, eternal counsel’s predetermined goal, thou art the one that such nobility didst lend to human nature, that its Maker scornd not to make Himself what He had made. Within thy womb rekindled was the Love, through whose warm influence in the eternal Peace this Flower hath blossomed thus. Here unto us thou art a noonday torch of Charity; and down below ‘mong mortal men, thou art a living fount of Hope. Lady, so great thou art, and hast such worth, that one who longs for Grace, and unto thee hath not recourse, wingless would wish to have his longing fly. Not only doth thy Kindliness give help to him that asketh it, but many times it freely runs ahead of his request. In thee is Mercy, Pity is in thee, in thee Magnificence, and all there is of Goodness in a creature meets in thee.

Now doth this man, who from the lowest drain of the Universe hath one by one beheld, as far as here, the forms of spirit-life, beseech thee, of thy grace, for so much strength that with his eyes he may uplift himself toward Ultimate Salvation higher still.
And I, who never for mine own sight burned more than I do for his, offer thee all my prayers, and pray that they be not too poor, that thou with thy prayers so dissolve each cloud of his mortality, that unto him the Highest Pleasure may unfold itself.

And furthermore, I pray to thee, O Queen, who canst whate’er thou wilt, that, after such a sight, thou keep all his affections sound. His human promptings let thy care defeat; see with how many blест ones Beatrice is clasping for my prayers her hands to thee! The eyes beloved and revered by God, intent on him who prayed, revealed to us how grateful unto her are earnest prayers. Thence they addressed them to the Eternal Light, wherein it may not be believed the eye of any creature finds so clear a way. And I, who to the End of all desires was drawing near, within me, as I sought, brought to its goal the ardor of desire. Bernard was smiling, and was making signs for me to look on high; but, as he wished, I was already of mine own accord; because my sight, as purer it became, was penetrating more and more the radiance of that High Light, which of itself is true. From this time onward greater was my sight than is our speech, which yields to such a vision, and memory also yields to such excess. And such as he, who seeth in a dream, after it, the imprinted feeling stays, while all the rest returns not to his mind; even such am I; for almost wholly fades my vision, yet the sweetness which was born of it is dripping still into my heart.

Even thus the snow is in the sun dissolved; even thus the Sibyl’s oracles, inscribed on flying leaves, were lost adown the wind. Ev’n as to what I do remember, mine will now be shorter than an infant’s speech, who at the breast still bathes his tongue. ’T was not that there was other than a simple semblance within the Living Light wherein I gazed, which always is what it hath been before; but through my sight, which in me, as I looked, was gathering strength, because I changed, one sole appearance underwent a change for me. Within the Lofty Light’s profound and clear subsistence there appeared to me three Rings, of threefold color and of one content; and one, as Rainbow is by Rainbow, seemed reflected by the other, while the third seemed like a Fire breathed equally from both. Oh, how, to my conception, short and weak is speech! And this, to what I saw, is such, that it is not enough to call it small. O Light Eternal, that alone dost dwell within Thyself, alone dost understand Thyself, and love and smile upon Thyself, Self-understanding and Self-understood! That Circle which appeared to be conceived within Thyself as a Reflected Light, when somewhat contemplated by mine eyes, within itself, of its own very color, to me seemed painted with our Human Form; whence wholly set upon it was my gaze. Like the geometer, who gives himself wholly to measuring the circle, nor, by thinking, finds the principle he needs; ev’n such was I at that new sight. I wished to see how to the Ring the Image there conformed itself, and found therein a place; but mine own wings were not enough for this; had not my mind been smitten by a flash of light, wherein it was willing came. Here power failed my high imagining; but, like a smoothly moving wheel, that Love was now revolving my desire and will, which moves the sun and all the other stars.