

Paradise Canto 19

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Canto XIX

Argument

The eagle speaks as with one voice proceeding from a multitude of spirits, that compose it; and declares the cause for which it is exalted to that state of glory. It then solves a doubt, which our Poet had entertained, respecting the possibility of salvation without belief in Christ; exposes the inefficacy of a mere profession of such belief; and prophesies the evil appearance that many Christian potentates will make at the day of judgment.

Before my sight appear'd, with open wings,
The beauteous image; in fruition sweet,
Gladdening the thronged spirits. Each did seem
A little ruby, whereon so intense
The sun - beam glow'd, that to mine eyes it came
In clear refraction. And that, which next
Befalls me to portray, voice hath not utter'd,
Nor hath ink written, nor in fantasy
Was e'er conceived. For I beheld and heard
The beak discourse; and, what intention form'd
Of many, singly as of one express,
Beginning: "For that I was just and piteous,
I am exalted to this height of glory,
The which no wish exceeds: and there on earth
Have I my memory left, e'en by the bad
Commended, while they leave its course untrod."

Thus is one heat from many embers felt;
As in that image many were the loves,
And one the voice, that issued from them all:
Whence I address'd them: "O perennial flowers
Of gladness everlasting! that exhale
In single breath your odours manifold;
Breathe now: and let the hunger be appeased,
That with great craving long hath held my soul,
Finding no food on earth. This well I know;

That if there be in Heaven a realm, that shows
In faithful mirror the celestial Justice,
Yours without veil reflects it. Ye discern
The heed, wherewith I do prepare myself
To hearken; ye, the doubt, that urges me

With such inveterate craving." Straight I saw,
Like to a falcon issuing from the hood,
That rears his head, and claps him with his wings,
His beauty and his eagerness bewraying;
So saw I move that stately sign, with praise
Of grace divine inwoven, and high song
Of inexpressive joy. "He," it began,
"Who turn'd His compass on the world's extreme,
And in that space so variously hath wrought,
Both openly and in secret; in such wise
Could not, through all the universe, display
Impression of His glory, that the Word
Of His omniscience should not still remain
In infinite excess. In proof whereof,
He first through pride supplanted, who was sum
Of each created being, waited not
For light celestial; and abortive fell.
Whence needs each lesser nature is but scant
Receptacle unto that God, which knows
No limit, measured by itself alone.
Therefore your sight, of the omnipresent Mind
A single beam, its origin must own
Surpassing far its utmost potency.
The ken, your world is gifted with, descends
In the everlasting Justice as low down,
As eye doth in the sea; which, though it mark
The bottom from the shore, in the wide main
Discerns it not; and ne'ertheless it is;
But hidden through its deepness. Light is none,
Save that which cometh from the pure serene
Of ne'er disturbed ether: for the rest,
'Tis darkness all; or shadow of the flesh,
Or else its poison. Here confess reveal'd
That covert, which hath hidden from thy search
The living justice, of the which thou madest
Such frequent question; for thou said'st - 'A man
Is born on Indus' banks, and none is there
Who speaks of Christ, nor who doth read nor write;
And all his inclinations and his acts,
As far as human reason sees, are good;
And he offendeth not in word or deed:
But unbaptized he dies, and void of faith.
Where is the justice that condemns him? where
His blame, if he believeth not?' - What then,
And who art thou, that on the stool wouldst sit
To judge at distance of a thousand miles
With the short - sighted vision of a span?

To him, who subtilizes thus with me,
There would assuredly be room for doubt
Even to wonder, did not the safe word
Of Scripture hold supreme authority.

"O animals of clay! O spirits gross!
The Primal Will,[1] that in itself is good,
Hath from itself, the chief Good, ne'er been moved.
Justice consists in consonance with it,
Derivable by no created good,
Whose very cause depends upon its beam."

[1: The divine will.]

As on her nest the stork, that turns about
Unto her young, whom lately she hath fed,
Whiles they with upward eyes do look on her;
So lifted I my gaze; and, bending so,
The ever - blessed image waved its wings,
Labouring with such deep counsel. Wheeling round
It warbled, and did say: "As are my notes
To thee, who understand'st them not; such is
The eternal judgment unto mortal ken."

Then still abiding in that ensign ranged,
Wherewith the Romans overawed the world,
Those burning splendours of the Holy Spirit
Took up the strain; and thus it spake again:
"None ever hath ascended to this realm,
Who hath not a believer been in Christ,
Either before or after the blest limbs
Were nail'd upon the wood. But lo! of those

Who call 'Christ, Christ,'[2] there shall be many found,
In judgment, further off from Him by far,
Than such to whom His name was never known.
Christians like these the Aethiop[3] shall condemn:
When that the two assemblages shall part;
One rich eternally, the other poor.

[2: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into
the kingdom of heaven." - Matt. vii. 21.]

[3: "The Aethiop." "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with
this generation, and shall condemn it." - Matt. xii. 41.]

"What may the Persians say unto your kings,
When they shall see that volume,[4] in the which
All their dispraise is written, spread to view?
There amidst Albert's[5] works shall that be read,
Which will give speedy motion to the pen,

When Prague[6] shall mourn her desolated realm.
There shall be read the woe, that he[7] doth work
With his adulterate money on the Seine,
Who by the tusk will perish; there be read
The thirsting pride, that maketh fool alike
The English and Scot,[8] impatient of their bound.
There shall be seen the Spaniard's luxury;[9]
The delicate living there of the Bohemian,[10]
Who still to worth has been a willing stranger.
The halter of Jerusalem[11] shall see
A unit for his virtue; for his vices,
No less a mark than million. He,[12] who guards

[4: "That volume." "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." - Rev. xx. 12.]

[5: "Albert." Purgatory, Canto vi. 98.]

[6: "Prague." The eagle predicts the devastation of Bohemia by Albert, which happened soon after this time, when that Emperor obtained the kingdom for his eldest son Rodolph.]

[7: "He." Philip IV of France, after the battle of Courtrai, 1302, in which the French were defeated by the Flemings, raised the nominal value of the coin. This King died in consequence of his horse being thrown to the ground by a wild boar, in 1314.]

[8: "The English and Scot." He adverts to the disputes between John Baliol and Edward I, the latter of whom is commended in the Purgatory, Canto vii. 130.]

[9: "The Spaniard's luxury." It seems probable that the allusion is to Ferdinand IV, who came to the crown in 1295, and died in 1312, at the age of twenty - four, in consequence, as it was supposed, of his extreme intemperance.]

[10: "The Bohemian." Wenceslaus II. Purgatory, Canto vii. 99.]

[11: "The halter of Jerusalem." Charles II of Naples and Jerusalem, who was lame.]

[12: "He." Frederick of Sicily, son of Peter III of Arragon. Purgatory, Canto vii. 117. The isle of fire is Sicily, where was the tomb of Anchises.]

The isle of fire by old Anchises honour'd,
Shall find his avarice there and cowardice;
And better to denote his littleness,
The writing must be letters maim'd, that speak
Much in a narrow space. All there shall know

His uncle[13] and his brother's[14] filthy doings,
Who so renown'd a nation and two crowns
Have bastardized. And they, of Portugal[15]
And Norway,[16] there shall be exposed, with him
Of Ratza,[17] who hath counterfeited ill
The coin of Venice. O blest Hungary![18]
If thou no longer patiently abidest
Thy ill - entreating: and, O blest Navarre![19]
If with thy mountainous girdle[20] thou wouldst arm thee.
In earnest of that day, e'en now are heard
Wailings and groans in Famagosta's streets
And Nicosia's,[21] grudging at their beast,
Who keepeth even footing with the rest."

[13: "His uncle." James, King of Majorca and Minorca, brother to Peter III.]

[14: "His brother." James II of Arragon, who died in 1327. See Purgatory, Canto vii. 117.]

[15: "Of Portugal." In the time of Dante, Dionysius was King of Portugal. He died in 1325, after a reign of nearly forty - six years, and does not seem to have deserved the stigma here fastened on him. Perhaps the rebellious son of Dionysius may be alluded to.]

[16: "Norway." Haquin, King of Norway, is probably meant; who having given refuge to the murderers of Eric VII, King of Denmark, A. D. 1288, commenced a war against his successor, Eric VIII, "which continued for nine years, almost to the utter ruin and destruction of both kingdoms."]

[17: "_____ him Of Ratza." One of the dynasty of the house of Nemagna, which ruled the Kingdom of Rassia or Ratza, in Sclavonia, from 1161 to 1371, and whose history may be found in Mauro Orbino. Uladislaus appears to have been the sovereign in Dante's time; but the disgraceful forgery, adverted to in the text, is not recorded by the historian.]

[18: "Hungary." The kingdom of Hungary was about this time disputed by Carobert, son of Charles Martel, and Wenceslaus, prince of Bohemia, son of Wenceslaus II.]

[19: "Navarre." Navarre was now under the yoke of France. It soon after (in 1328) followed the advice of Dante, and had a monarch of its own.]

[20: "Mountainous girdle." The Pyrenees.]

[21: "_____ Famagosta's streets And Nicosia's." Cities in the Kingdom of Cyprus, at that time ruled by Henry VII, a pusillanimous prince. The meaning appears to be, that the complaints made by those cities of their weak and worthless governor may be regarded as an earnest of his condemnation at the last doom.]

