

Paradise Canto 30

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Canto XXX

Argument

Dante is taken up with Beatrice into the empyrean; and there having his sight strengthened by her aid, and by the virtue derived from looking on the river of light, he sees the triumph of the Angels and of the souls of the blessed.

Noon's fervid hour perchance six thousand miles[1]
From hence is distant; and the shadowy cone
Almost to level on our earth declines;
When, from the midmost of this blue abyss,
By turns some star is to our vision lost.
And straightway as the handmaid of the sun
Puts forth her radiant brow, all, light by light,
Fade; and the spangled firmament shuts in,
E'en to the loveliest of the glittering throng.
Thus vanish'd gradually from my sight
The triumph, which plays ever round the point,
That overcame me, seeming (for it did)
Engirt[2] by that it girdeth. Wherefore love,
With loss of other object, forced me bend
Mine eyes on Beatrice once again.

[1: He compares the vanishing of the vision to the fading away of the stars at dawn, when it is noonday 6,000 miles off, and the shadow, formed by the earth over the part of it inhabited by the Poet, is about to disappear.]

[2: "Appearing to be encompassed by these angelic bands, which are in reality encompassed by it."]

If all, that hitherto is told of her,
Were in one praise concluded, 'twere too weak
To furnish out this turn. Mine eyes did look
On beauty, such, as I believe in sooth,

Not merely to exceed our human; but,
That save its Maker, none can to the full
Enjoy it. At this point o'erpower'd I fail;
Unequal to my theme; as never bard
Of buskin or of sock hath fail'd before.
For as the sun doth to the feeblest sight,
E'en so remembrance of that witching smile

Hath dispossesst my spirit of itself.
Not from that day, when on this earth I first
Beheld her charms, up to that view of them,
Have I with song applausive ever ceased
To follow; but now follow them no more;
My course here bounded, as each artist's is,
When it doth touch the limit of his skill.

She (such as I bequeath her to the bruit
Of louder trump than mine, which hasteneth on
Urging its arduous matter to the close)
Her words resumed, in gesture and in voice
Resembling one accustom'd to command:
"Forth[3] from the last corporeal are we come
Into the Heaven, that is unbodied light;
Light intellectual, replete with love;
Love of true happiness, replete with joy;
Joy, that transcends all sweetness of delight.
Here shalt thou look on either mighty host[4]
Of Paradise; and one in that array,
Which in the final judgment thou shalt see."

[3: From the ninth sphere to the empyrean, which is mere light.]

[4: Of Angels, that remained faithful, and of beatified souls; the latter in the form they will have at the last day.]

As when the lightning, in a sudden spleen
Unfolded, dashes from the blinding eyes
The visive spirits, dazzled and bedimm'd;
So, round about me, fulminating streams
Of living radiance play'd, and left me swathed
And veiled in dense impenetrable blaze.
Such weal is in the love, that stills this heaven;
For its own flame[5] the torch thus fitting ever.

[5: Thus disposing the spirits to receive its own beatific light.]

No sooner to my listening ear had come
The brief assurance, than I understood
New virtue into me infused, and sight
Kindled afresh, with vigour to sustain
Excess of light however pure. I look'd;
And, in the likeness of a river, saw
Light flowing, from whose amber - seeming waves
Flash'd up effulgence, as they glided on
'Twixt banks, on either side, painted with spring,
Incredible how fair: and, from the tide,
There ever and anon, outstarting, flew
Sparkles instinct with life; and in the flowers

Did set them, like to rubies, chased in gold:
Then, as if drunk with odours, plunged again
Into the wondrous flood; from which, as one
Re - enter'd, still another rose. "The thirst
Of knowledge high, whereby thou art inflamed,
To search the meaning of what here thou seest,
The more it warms thee, pleases me the more,
But first behoves thee of this water drink,
Or e'er that longing be allay'd." So spake
The day - star of mine eyes: then thus subjoin'd:
"This stream; and these, forth issuing from its gulf,
And diving back, a living topaz each;
With all this laughter on its bloomy shores;
Are but a preface, shadowy of the truth
They emblem: not that, in themselves, the things
Are crude; but on thy part is the defect,
For that thy views not yet aspire so high."

Never did babe, that had outslept his wont,
Rush, which such eager straining, to the milk,
As I toward the water; bending me,
To make the better mirrors of mine eyes
In the refining wave: and as the eaves
Of mine eyelids did drink of it, forthwith
Seem'd it unto me turn'd from length to round.
Then as a troop of maskers, when they put
Their vizors off, look other than before;
The counterfeited semblance thrown aside:
So into greater jubilee were changed
Those flowers and sparkles; and distinct I saw,
Before me, either court of Heaven display'd.

O prime enlightener! thou who gavest me strength
On the high triumph of Thy realm to gaze;
Grant virtue not to utter what I kenn'd.

There is in Heaven a light, whose goodly shine
Makes the Creator visible to all
Created, that in seeing Him alone
Have peace; and in a circle spreads so far,
That the circumference were too loose a zone
To girdle in the sun. All is one beam,
Reflected from the summit of the first,
That moves, which being hence and vigour takes.
And as some cliff, that from the bottom eyes
His image mirror'd in the crystal flood,
As if to admire his brave apparelling
Of verdure and of flowers; so, round about,

Eying the light, on more than million thrones,
 Stood, eminent, whatever from our earth
 Has to the skies return'd. How wide the leaves,
 Extended to their utmost, of this rose,
 Whose lowest step embosoms such a space
 Of ample radiance! Yet, nor amplitude
 Nor height impeded, but my view with ease
 Took in the full dimensions of that joy.
 Near or remote, what there avails, where God
 Immediate rules, and Nature, awed, suspends
 Her sway? Into the yellow of the rose
 Perennial, which, in bright expansiveness,
 Lays forth its gradual blooming, redolent
 Of praises to the never - wintering sun,
 As one, who fain would speak yet holds his peace,
 Beatrice led me; and, "Behold," she said,
 "This fair assemblage; stoles of snowy white,
 How numberless. The city, where we dwell,
 Behold how vast; and these our seats so throng'd,
 Few now are wanting here. In that proud stall,
 On which, the crown, already o'er its state
 Suspended, holds thine eyes - or e'er thyself
 Mayst at the wedding sup - shall rest the soul
 Of the great Harry,[6] he who, by the world
 Augustus hail'd, to Italy must come,
 Before her day be ripe. But ye are sick,
 And in your tetchy wantonness as blind,
 As is the bantling, that of hunger dies,
 And drives away the nurse. Nor may it be,
 That he,[7] who in the sacred forum sways,
 Openly or in secret, shall with him
 Accordant walk: whom God will not endure
 I' the holy office long; but thrust him down
 To Simon Magus, where Alagna's priest[8]
 Will sink beneath him: such will be his meed."

[6: "Of the great Harry." The Emperor Henry VII, who died in 1313.

"Henry, Count of Luxemburg, held the imperial power three years, seven months and eighteen days from his first coronation to his death. He was a man wise, and just, and gracious; brave and intrepid in arms; a man of honor and a good catholic; and although by his lineage he was of no great condition, yet he was of a magnanimous heart, much feared and held in awe; and if he had lived longer, would have done the greatest things." G. Villani.]

[7: Clement V. See Canto xxvii. 53.]

[8: "Alagna's priest." Pope Boniface VIII. Hell, Canto xix. 79.]

