

a mere crack cleft in the wall, approached by three steps. The first is of white marbles, so smooth and polished that it reflects the exact appearance of him who gazes on it. The second is of dark, inky purple, rugged and burnt, and cracked lengthwise and across. The third, which masses itself above, is of porphyry, flaming as the blood which leaps from an artery. On the threshold of diamond above this step, sits an Angel, clad in ashen-colored garments, who holds a key of silver and of gold. Learning that they had come thither by the grace of heaven, the angel raises Dante, — who has smitten on his breast and fallen prostrate at his feet, — and with the point of his sword marks the letter P seven times upon his forehead. "See," he said, "that, when thou art within, thou wash off these strokes." Then, telling them that to those who lie prostrate there he is bidden to lean to mercy, rather than to justice, he pushes open the sacred door, warning them that he

who looks back must at once return, as not being worthy of the kingdom of heaven. The meaning of the allegory is plain. The narrow cleft in the rock is the door of penitence, — the needle's eye, — which, looked on from afar, seems much narrower to the repentant sinner than when he has really faced it. It can only be approached by three steps, — the white step of sincerity, which mirrors as he is the man who stands on it; the dark, rough, cross-splintered step of contrition; the flaming porphyry step of self-devotion, of love to God and man.

Only by candor, by sorrow, by love, can the sinner set his feet on the diamond threshold of his Redeemer's merits; and to such alone can the Angel of absolution, in his sad-colored robe, with his golden key of authority, and his silver key of holy discernment, open that steep path where he who hath once put his hand to the plough must not look back again. The seven P's on the forehead are the *peccata*, the seven deadly

sins, of which every mark must be effaced from any brow which can ever be uplifted to the light of God.

They have now passed out of the Ante-Purgatory, and reached the lowest of the seven terraces, which, connected with each other by flights of steps, run round the mountain of Purgatory proper. Each terrace is devoted to the punishment of one of the deadly sins. But since all sins are inextricably linked together, *every* soul must pass through all the seven remedial penalties.

This lowest terrace, where the sin of Pride is punished, and where they hear the spirits singing, "We praise Thee, O God," is of white marble, exquisitely carved with sculptures, representing scenes of pride by way of warning, and of humility by way of encouragement. Dante realized the power of sacred teaching by means of art. The spirits, which there undergo the blessedness of healing punishment, are bowed to

the earth with weights, under which, now retributively humbled, they crawl stooping along, reminding Dante of the corbels in a Gothic building, which have the knees bent painfully to the breast, "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased."

As they creep along, they chant the Lord's Prayer, only saying that the clause, "Lead us not into temptation," is for their brethren upon earth, since they themselves, through the grace of God, can have no temptations more. At the end of the terrace an Angel meets them. He is a fair creature, clad in white, and in his face a quivering beam, as of the morning star. Opening his arms and wings, he bids them ascend. With one brush of his heavenly plumes upon Dante's forehead, he erases the first of the seven P's; while, finding his weight indefinitely lightened by that remission of pride, to the sound of the chant, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*" Dante mounts to the second terrace, where souls expiate the sin of Envy.

It is formed of colored rock of the livid hue of their besetting sin; and there, with their eyelids sewn together with an iron wire—blinded as once they had been self-blinded by vice—leaning their backs upon the rocks, and clad in teasing cloth of hair, the spirits, once sinful, but now sure of ultimate forgiveness, rue the evil eye, the dulness, and the irritability of the mortal sin of Envy. These helpless, squalid, self-blinded souls, with whom what was once inward has become outward, know now that they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Voices in the air recall to them the examples of the sin and of its punishment. A splendid Angel shows the poets the next stair; and to the song, "*Blessed are the merciful,*" they climb to the third terrace.

There, in a dense, bitter, blinding fog,—so dense that Dante can only move through it by leaning on Virgil's shoulder,—is punished the sin of Anger, where the spirits,

their eyes dim because of sorrow, are singing the *Agnus Dei*, and where Dante sees a warning vision of wrath and of its punishment. Then the Angel of peace, singing "*Blessed are the peacemakers,*" gleams through the smoke, and obliterates the third P from Dante's brow.

On the fourth terrace, hurrying round and round in incessant haste, while they warn each other of the blessing of promptitude, and the sin of neglect, the souls of men who have done the work of God negligently expiate the sin of Sloth; and there, before he reaches the three last terraces, where worldly and carnal sins are punished, Dante has a dream of the bewitching Siren of sensual temptation, shown in her true loathliness by the grace of heaven. Then an Angel with swan-like wings brushes off another of the fatal letters, sweetly singing to them, "*Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.*"

In the fifth circle the spirits of the Ava-

ricious, who had been "breast-buried in the rubbish of the world," lie prostrate, weeping on the earth; and here the soul of Pope Hadrian V. tells Dante that he had sinned by avarice till he became Pope of Rome, and, crushed by that office, and discovering his full misery and vanity of life, he had repented. Soon afterwards the poets hear a sudden outburst of "*Glory to God in the highest,*" and feel the whole mountain tremble; they learn that this always happens from the sympathy of every one of these forgiven souls, when any one of them, ending his expiation, is suffered to mount upwards to Paradise. For when the will that accepts punishments culminates in the will that seeks freedom, God says of the soul, "*Loose him and let him go.*" The joy is for the soul of the poet Statius.

On the sixth terrace the Gluttons and Drunkards are punished by emaciation, with perpetual thirst and hunger. When they

reach the stair at the end of the terrace, an Angel, glorious as metal in the furnace, obliterates the last but one of the seven fatal P's, by touching Dante on the forehead with plumes which breathe ambrosial fragrance, like the May breeze blown over grass and flowers at dawn, and "sated with the innumerable rose." In the seventh and last circle, sensual sinners expiate their carnal wickedness in burning flames. They walk as it were in the light of their own fire, and in the sparks which they have kindled. Outside the flame stands an Angel, singing in voice sweeter than mortal, "*Blessed are the pure in heart.*" He tells Dante that he, and that every soul which would enter heaven, must pass through that purifying flame; for "if any man's work shall be burned he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire."

The mandate strikes into the soul of Dante a deathlike horror. He remembers that he has seen the horrid spectacle of human be-

ings burnt alive; and scarcely, by assuring him that the torment *cannot* end in death, and that, beyond the fire, he will see the glorified form of Beatrice, does Virgil persuade his tardy conscience to plunge into the willing agony. It must be so, for "God is like a refiner's fire;" yet, "when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned." He enters the healing flame, guided by a sweet voice which sang, "*Come, ye blessed of My Father;*" but "when I was within," said Dante, "I would have flung myself into molten glass to cool me, so immeasurable was the burning there."

But he passes through it safely, and now the soul is near the end of its long course of painful penitence. The soul of Dante, in its holy longing, feels as if it were winged for flight. They are on an odorous soil, under the leaves of a forest resonant with the song of birds, and tremulous with a soft breeze which plays upon

their foreheads. Through the wood, amid May blossoms, flows a stream of purest crystal; and on the other side of it, singing and gathering flowers, is a lovely lady, Matilda, type of the active life which delights in the works of God. Already Virgil has said to Dante that he can guide him no farther. "The temporal fire, and the eternal, hast thou seen, my son, and hast come to a part where I myself can discern no farther. Thou hast come forth from the steep and narrow ways; henceforth take thine own will for thy guide. See there the sun which gleams upon thy brow; see the tender grass, the flowers, and the shrubs which the soil of this land produces for itself. Free, true, and sound is now thy judgment; expect no further word or sign from me. Therefore, over thyself, I crown and I mitre thee."

The stream on whose bank they stand is called Lethe, and, at another part, Eunoe. Innocence and virtue become the restored

heritage of the new and childlike man. The water of Lethe chases from the mind the memory of sin; the water of Eunoe recalls every good deed to mind. When Matilda has told them this, she sings as in rapture, "*Blessed are they whose sins are covered.*"

A gleam flashes through the forest, a sweet melody runs through the glowing air, and they see a glorious vision of the symbols of Christ and the Church, and the elders and apostles, and among them, amid a cloud of flowers shed by the hands of angels, a Lady whose white veil is crowned with olive. The blood of Dante thrills as he recognizes Beatrice, now the personification of Heavenly Wisdom, but at the same time the sweet lady of his love. He turns for sympathy to Virgil, but Virgil has vanished. In those regions human knowledge can help no more. And as he begins to weep that he has lost his guide and friend, Beatrice says to him, "Dante, weep not yet that Virgil leaves

thee; weep not yet, for thou must weep soon another wound;" and then, towering over him in imperious attitude, like a mother over a son that is in fault, she asks him how he could have dared to approach this mountain—he who has fallen from his boyish purity and innocence into intellectual aberrations, if not into carnal sin and folly? So sternly does she speak to him, as his head is bowed in shame, that the angels suddenly begin the plaintive strain, "*In Thee, O Lord, has been my hope,*" as though indirectly they were pleading for him with the beautiful stern monitress. At their tenderness his heart, which has been benumbed with anguish, breaks like melting ice into sighs and tears.

Broken down with utter remorse and agony at the continued strain of her lofty reproaches, standing like a boy ashamed of guilt, mutely listening with his eyes upon the ground, and at last bidden to raise his face, he falls down in a swoon. Then Ma-

tilda plunges him in the waters of forgetfulness, and he hears the angels sing, "*Thou shalt wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.*" The four virtues — Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude — receive him. He is bidden to gaze on Beatrice, and sees the light of Christ reflected in her eyes. Then he is suffered to drink the waters of Eunoe, which are sweeter than words can tell; and refreshed, like young plants which are reclad by spring with tender leaves, he issues from the holy wave, pure, and ready to mount up to the stars.

Such, in merest outline, is this noble poem, which, in all its elements, — many of which I necessarily omit, — is one of the noblest ever written. Let me touch, in conclusion, on one or two of its most instructive features.

1. Notice, first, the intense importance which the souls in Purgatory attach to the prayers of their relatives on earth. "Pray

for me," all the spirits ask. "Tell my Giovanna, my innocent little daughter Giovanna, to pray for me," says Nino; "I think her mother loves me no more." "Reveal to my sweet Costanza that thou hast seen me here," says King Manfred; "for the prayers of the other world avail much here." "The tears of my Nella, my little Nella whom I loved so much, have brought me here so soon," says Forese. "Neither my wife Giovanna, nor any one else, cares for me, therefore I go among the rest with downcast looks," says Buconte of Montefeltro. But you will say, and rightly, that the Church of England gives no sanction to — though she does not inhibit — prayers for the dead. The dead have passed to the mercy of the Merciful, and He, without the prayers which He has not told us to offer, will deal with them in His mercy. But remember always, in reading Dante, that you are not only reading of Hell, and Purgatory, and Heaven hereafter, but also

of vice, repentance, holiness now. And can anything help us more in the contrition of a penitent life, than to feel our solidarity with the communion of saints, and to know that intensity of love prevails against length of time, and that we can be helped by the prayers of those who love us? "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

"And thou," says King Arthur to Sir Bedivere, —

"If thou should'st never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by
prayer
Than this world dreams of. Therefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

2. There is another great lesson which the "Purgatorio" will teach us. It is that

forgiveness of sins is a very different thing from remission of consequences. Esau repents, but he has lost the blessing. Achan repents, but he has to die by fire in the valley of Achor. David repents, but thenceforth the dark spirits of lust and blood are walking in his house. The impure man repents; but his bones are still full of the sin of his youth, which shall die down with him in the dust. The prodigal repents; but nevertheless his root has been as rottenness, and his blossom has gone up as dust. The "Purgatorio" will help to teach us that sin is far more to be dreaded than punishment.

There is a deep lesson here. It is the lesson that —

"Hearts which verily repent
Are burdened with impunity,
And comforted by chastisement:
That punishment's the best to bear
Which follows soonest on the sin;
And guilt's a game where losers fare
Better than those who seem to win."

3. Once more there is the lesson, how pressing is the need for repentance. Men delay repentance; and yet, for the soul that has fallen into sin, repentance is the very work of life. With awful folly they pave hell with good resolutions which they do not fulfil, and bid God await their leisure. How different is it when a soul has realized the awful importance of time! In Dante's "Purgatorio," the one thought, the one aim, the one desire, is, with all speed, to get rid of the sin that has been the shame and curse of life. The spirits on the terrace of sloth will not stop, even for a moment, in their race. Pope Adrian, weeping for his avarice, bids Dante leave him, that his tears may not be interrupted. They are all free; but their *will* to suffer proves their worthiness, for, by the ordinance of heaven, they are as eager for the torment as once they were for sin. When a soul is in earnest, it has not time to waste on anything which does not further its own duty and its own redemption.

Here, then, are a few of the many lessons of the poem in which Dante draws the picture of men suffering, in calm and holy hope, the sharp discipline of repentance, amid the prayers, the melodies, the consoling images and thoughts of the Christian life. "It was one and the same man who arose from the despair, the agony, the vivid and vulgar horrors of the Inferno, to the sense of sure salvation, sinlessness, and joy ineffable. No man ever measured the greatness of man, in all its forms, with so true and yet so admiring an eye, and with such glowing hope, as he who has also portrayed so awfully man's littleness and vileness.

He never lets go the recollection that human life, if it grovels at one end in corruption and sin, and has to struggle through the sweat and dust and disfigurement of earthly toil, has throughout compensations, remedies, spheres innumerable of profitable activity, sources inexhaustible of delight and consolation; and, at the other end, a

perfection which cannot be named. And he went farther: no one who could understand and do homage to greatness in man ever drew the line so strongly between greatness and goodness, and so unhesitatingly placed the hero of this world only — placed him in all his magnificence, and honored with no timid or dissembling reverence — at the distance of worlds below the place of the lowest saint.”

THE PARADISO.

The “Paradiso” of Dante never has been, or can be, so popular with the mass of readers as the “Inferno” or the “Purgatorio.” It has not the weird and thrilling interest and variety of the “Inferno,” with its multitudines of contemporary references. It has not the human nearness of the “Purgatorio.” What sin is, we all know; what penitence is, we all know, or may know; what is the nature of the unbroken beatitude of glo-

rified spirits, we can only dream. We cannot even distantly realize — we can only shadow forth in the language of dim metaphor — the conditions of eternal bliss. It is quite natural to exclaim —

“Oh for a deeper insight into Heaven!
 More knowledge of the glory and the joy
 Which there unto the happy souls is given;
 Their intercourse, their worship, their employ!
 For it is past belief that Christ hath died
 Only that we unending Psalms may sing;
 That all the gain Death’s awful curtain hides
 Is this eternity of antheing;
 And this praised rest — are we to sit forever
 Without more strife, or subject of endeavor?
 Alas! too oft with thoughts of earth or hell
 We make our heaven less conceivable.”

In Dante’s Paradise no possibility seems left for earthly analogies, except such as are derived from the two least carnal senses, those of sight and hearing. Hence the Paradisiacal sources of joy are all derived either from light or melody. Of both these sources of delight there was an abun-

dance in the "Purgatorio," though in the "Inferno" there were only horrible miasma, lurid gleams, and sounds of horror and fearfulness; but in the "Paradiso" even the glory and the music are bathed in a more ethereal, or rather immaterial, atmosphere.

The heaven of Dante is a universe of light. His poem begins with the words,—

"The glory of Him who moves all things penetrates through the Universe, and shines forth in one quarter more, and less in another. In the heaven which receives most of His light was I."

What he saw, he says, surpasses utterance.

"Nathless all,
That in my thoughts I of that sacred realm
Could store, shall now be subject of my song."

Light is the most essential characteristic of the poem. Everywhere there is light,—in every circle of the planetary and the starry and the crystalline heavens; and in the Empyrean, and in the mystical White

Rose, and in the Ladder of God whose summit is invisible, and in the River of Life flaming with splendor, between two banks bright with flowers; and in the central point of light itself, so intense that no eye can gaze on it, so minute that the smallest star in the firmament would seem a moon beside it. The very regions through which he passes are like eternal pearls; and he and Beatrice glide through them as rays of light enter transparent water, lucid and white as sunstruck diamonds. And in this brimming flood of light move the beatified saints in melody and glory, circling round Dante in vivid garlands of eternal roses, or swathed in environments of ambient radiance, shooting from place to place, like fires in alabaster—happy fires, living topazes, living rubies, flaming in ethereal sunshine—multitudes of splendors flitting through the crystal gleam like birds! And even after these unimaginable "varieties of light, and combinations of stars and rays, and jewelled

reflections," there are fresh throngs of splendors — cressets and crowns and circles — singing round the Virgin in ineffable, indescribable glories, in blinding and bewildering brilliancies. And the inmost Paradise is one great White Rose; and its yellow centre is the central light whose circumference would outgird the sun; and its petals upon petals are innumerable ranks of spotless spirits, all gazing upon the Light of Light; and as bees flit among flowers, so fluttering about the petals of the Eternal Rose — "their wings of gold, their robes white as snow, their faces radiant as pure flame" — enjoying and enjoyed, the multitudes of the Angels deposit in the recesses of those happy petals the peace and glow brought down from the bosom of God Himself.

The heavens also ring with perpetual music, angelic, archangelic, the music of the spheres, and the hymns of holy spirits

"That sing, and singing in their glory move."

Music is undoubtedly the one earthly science which seems to open widest to our imagination the doors of heaven,

"On golden hinges moving."

We may quote the celebrated words of Newman: "By musical sounds great unknown wonders seem to be typified. There are but seven notes in the scale: make them fourteen, yet what slender outfit for so vast an enterprise! What science brings so much out of so little? Out of what poor elements does some great master in it create his new world! Shall we say that all his exuberant inventiveness is mere ingenuity? a trick of art — without reality, without meaning? Is it possible that the inexhaustible evolution and disposition of notes, so rich yet so simple, so intricate yet so regular, so various yet so majestic, should be a mere sound which is gone and perishes? Can it be that those mysterious stirrings of the heart, and keen emotions,

and strange yearnings after we know not what, and awful impressions from we know not whence, should be wrought in us by what is unsubstantial, and comes and goes, and begins and ends in itself? It is not so. It cannot be! No, they have escaped from some higher sphere; they are the outpourings of eternal harmony in the medium of created sound; they are echoes from our home; they are the voice of Angels, or the Magnificat of saints, or the living laws of the divine governance. Something they are besides themselves, which we cannot compass, which we cannot utter, though mortal man, and he perhaps not otherwise distinguished among his fellows, has the art of eliciting them."

And in this respect our own Milton, himself a musician, felt exactly as Dante did, as he shows, not only in "Paradise Lost," but throughout his poems. These lines are quite in the spirit of his mighty predecessor:—

"Blest pair of sirens, pledges of heaven's joy,
Sphere-born harmonious sisters, Voice and Verse,
Wed your divine sounds, and mixed powers employ,
And to our high-raised phantasy present
That undisturbed song of pure concert,
Aye sung before the sapphire-colored throne
To him who sits thereon,
With saintly shout and solemn jubilee;
Where the bright Seraphim in burning row
Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow,
And the cherubic host in thousands quires
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,
With those just spirits that wear victorious palms,
Hymns devout and holy psalms
Singing everlastingly."

Looking at the Paradise more in detail, we must first say a word on Dante's system of the universe. It was a strange one, and only has an historic interest, being of course wholly prescientific. To him the solar system was not heliocentric, but geocentric; i.e., the sun was not its centre, but the earth. The earth is surrounded by the two spheres of air and fire, through which the Mount of Purgatory ascends. Beyond the terrestrial Paradise, at the sum-

mit of the Mount, are the nine heavens of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the fixed stars, and the *Primum Mobile*, or crystalline heaven. These sweep round the spheres of air and fire in circular and concentric orbits. These orbits increase in size, and the heavens in swiftness of motion, the farther they are from earth and the nearer to God. Beyond them is the tenth heaven — the all-containing, uncontained, timeless, spaceless, motionless, boundless Empyrean. Here is the “Rose of Paradise,” wherein dwell eternally the saints of God; and at the centre of this rose is “an effulgent lake, formed by the reflection of the uncreated light. This rose is the convex summit of the *Primum Mobile*, and it is so placed that a line drawn from its centre to our globe would touch the earthly Jerusalem.” At the centre of this effulgence, manifested as one intensely luminous point, is the Divine Essence. Round this atomic

point of burning brilliancy, circle the nine orders of Angels, divided into three Hierarchies. First and nearest are the Hierarchies of Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones; next the Dominations, Virtues, and Powers; then the Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. These Hierarchies are first set forth in the ancient work ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite; and you will remember in “Paradise Lost” the lines, —

“Hear, all ye angels, progeny of light,
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers!”

Dante was permeated with the conception that “God is Light.” And here again we note how much the ideas of Milton resemble those of Dante, when he sings:—

“Hail, holy Light, offspring of Heaven first-born,
Or of the Eternal coeternal beam!
May I express thee unblamed? Since God is light,
And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from eternity: dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence uncreate.