

CANTO III.

ARGUMENT.

Our Poet, perceiving no shadow except that cast by his own body, is fearful that Virgil has deserted him; but he is freed from that error, and both arrive together at the foot of the mountain. On finding it too steep to climb, they inquire the way from a troop of spirits that are coming towards them, and are by them shown which is the easiest ascent. Manfredi, King of Naples, who is one of these spirits, bids Dante inform his daughter Costanza, Queen of Arragon, of the manner in which he had died.

THEM sudden flight had scatter'd o'er the plain,
Turn'd towards the mountain, whither reason's voice
Drives us: I, to my faithful company
Adhering, left it not. For how, of him
Deprived, might I have sped? or who, beside,
Would o'er the mountainous tract have led my steps?
He, with the bitter pang of self-remorse,
Seem'd smitten. O clear conscience, and upright!
How doth a little failing wound thee sore.¹

Soon as his feet desisted (slackening pace)
From haste, that mars all decency of act,²
My mind, that in itself before was wrapt,
Its thought expanded, as with joy restored;
And full against the steep ascent I set
My face, where highest³ to heaven its top o'erflows.
The sun, that flared behind, with ruddy beam

¹ O clear conscience, and upright!
How doth a little failing wound thee sore.—

"Ch' era al cor picciol fallo amaro morso."
Tasso, *Gierusalemme Liberata*, c. x., st. 59.

² Haste, that mars all decency of act.—Aristotle, in his "Physiog.," c. iii., reckons it among the *ἀναιδούς σημεῖα* ("the signs of an impudent man"), that he is *ἐν ταῖς κινήσεσιν ὀξύς* ("quick in his motions"). Compare Sophocles, "Electra," 878:

Τὸ κῶσιον μεθεῖσα.

"Joy, my dear sister, wings my quick return,
And with more speed than decency allows."
Potter.

³ Where highest.—Lombardi proposes, with some hesitation, a different meaning from that which has hitherto been affixed to the words—

"Che 'nverso 'l ciel più alto si dislaga;"
and would construe them, "that raises itself higher than every other mountain above the sea" ("sopra l'allagamento delle acque del mare"). The conjecture is at least ingenious, and has obtained new force by the arguments of Monti in his "Proposta."

Before my form was broken; for in me
His rays resistance met. I turn'd aside
With fear of being left, when I beheld
Only before myself the ground obscured.
When thus my solace, turning him around,
Bespake me kindly: "Why distrustest thou?
Believest not I am with thee, thy sure guide?
It now is evening there, where buried lies
The body in which I cast a shade, removed
To Naples' from Brundisium's wall. Nor thou
Marvel, if before me no shadow fall,
More than that in the skyey element
One ray obstructs not other. To endure
Torments of heat and cold extreme, like frames
That virtue hath disposed, which, how it works,
Wills not to us should be reveal'd. Insane,
Who hopes our reason may that space explore,
Which holds three persons in one substance knit.
Seek not the wherefore, race of human kind;
Could ye have seen the whole, no need had been
For Mary to bring forth. Moreover, ye
Have seen such men desiring fruitlessly;²
To whose desires, repose would have been given,
That now but serve them for eternal grief.
I speak of Plato, and the Stagirite,
And others many more." And then he bent
Downwards his forehead, and in troubled mood³
Broke off his speech. Meanwhile we had arrived
Far as the mountain's foot, and there the rock
Found of so steep ascent, that nimblest steps
To climb it had been vain. The most remote,
Most wild, untrodden path, in all the tract

¹ To Naples.—Virgil died at Brundisium, from whence his body is said to have been removed to Naples.

² Desiring fruitlessly.—See "Hell," canto iv. 39.

³ In troubled mood.—Because he himself (Virgil) was amongst the number of spirits who thus desired without hope.

"Twixt Lerice and Turbia,¹ were to this

A ladder easy and open of access.

"Who knows on which hand now the steep declines?"

My master said, and paused; "so that he may

Ascend, who journeys without aid of wing?"

And while, with looks directed to the ground,

The meaning of the pathway he explored,²

And I gazed upward round the stony height;

On the left hand appear'd to us a troop

Of spirits, that toward us moved their steps;

Yet moving seem'd not, they so slow approach'd.

I thus my guide address'd: "Upraise thine eyes:

Lo! that way some, of whom thou mayst obtain

Counsel, if of thyself thou find'st it not."

Straightway he look'd, and with free speech replied:

"Let us tend thither: they but softly come.

And thou be firm in hope, my son beloved."

Now was that crowd from us distant as far,

(When we some thousand steps,³ I say, had past,)

As at a throw the nervous arm could fling;

When all drew backward on the massy crags

Of the steep bank, and firmly stood unmoved,

As one, who walks in doubt, might stand to look.

"O spirits perfect! O already chosen!"

Virgil to them began: "by that blest peace,

Which, as I deem, is for you all prepared,

Instruct us where the mountain low declines,

¹ *Twixt Lerice and Turbia.*—At that time the two extremities of the Genoese republic; the former on the east, the latter on the west. A very ingenious writer has had occasion, for a different purpose, to mention one of these places as remarkably secluded by its mountainous situation. "On an eminence among the mountains, between the two little cities, Nice and Monaco, is the village of Torbia, a name formed from the Greek *τρόπαια*."—*Mitford on the Harmony of Language*, sect. xv., p. 351, 2nd edit.

² *The meaning of the pathway he explored.*—Lombardi reads—

"Tenea 'l viso basso,

Esaminando del cammin la mente,"

and explains it, "he bent down his face, his mind being occupied with considering their way to ascend the mountain." I doubt much whether the words can bear that construction.

³ *When we some thousand steps.*—Mr. Carlyle puts a query to my former translation of this passage. It was certainly erroneous.

So that attempt to mount it be not vain.

For who knows most, him loss of time most grieves."

As sheep,¹ that step from forth their fold, by one,

Or pairs, or three at once; meanwhile the rest

Stand fearfully, bending the eye and nose

To ground, and what the foremost does, that do

The others, gathering round her if she stops

Simple and quiet, nor the cause discern;

So saw I moving to advance the first,

Who of that fortunate crew were at the head,

Of modest mien, and graceful in their gait

When they before me had beheld the light

From my right side fall broken on the ground,

So that the shadow reach'd the cave; they stopp'd,

And somewhat back retired: the same did all

Who follow'd, though unweeting of the cause.

"Unask'd of you, yet freely I confess

This is a human body which ye see.

That the sun's light is broken on the ground,

Marvel not: but believe, that not without

Virtue derived from Heaven, we to climb

Over this wall aspire." So them bespake

My master; and that virtuous tribe rejoin'd:

"Turn, and before you there the entrance lies;"

Making a signal to us with bent hands.

Then of them one began. "Whoe'er thou art,

Who journey'st thus this way, thy visage turn;

Think if me elsewhere thou hast ever seen."

I towards him turn'd, and with fix'd eye beheld.

Comely and fair, and gentle of aspect

He seem'd, but on one brow a gash was mark'd.

¹ *As sheep.*—The imitative nature of these animals supplies our poet with another comparison in his "Convito," p. 34: "Questi sono da chiamare pecore," &c., "These may be called flocks of sheep and not men; for if one sheep should throw himself

down a precipice of a thousand feet, all the rest would follow; and if one for any cause in passing a road should leap, all the rest would do the same, though they saw nothing to leap over."

When humbly I disclaim'd to have beheld
Him ever: "Now behold!" he said, and show'd
High on his breast a wound: then smiling spake.

"I am Manfredi,¹ grandson to the Queen
Costanza:² whence I pray thee, when return'd,
To my fair daughter³ go, the parent glad
Of Aragonia and Sicilia's pride;
And of the truth inform her, if of me
Aught else be told. When by two mortal blows
My frame was shatter'd, I betook myself
Weeping to him, who of free will forgives.
My sins were horrible: but so wide arms
Hath goodness infinite, that it receives
All who turn to it. Had this text divine
Been of Cosenza's shepherd better scann'd,
Who then by Clement on my hunt was set,⁴
Yet at the bridge's head my bones had lain,

¹ *Manfredi*.—King of Naples and Sicily, and the natural son of Frederick II. He was lively and agreeable in his manners, and delighted in poetry, music, and dancing. But he was luxurious and ambitious, void of religion, and in his philosophy an Epicurean. See G. Villani, lib. vi., cap. xlvii., and Mr. Mathias's "Tiraboschi," vol. i., p. 99. He fell in the battle with Charles of Anjou in 1265, alluded to in canto xxviii. of "Hell," v. 13, or rather in that which ensued in the course of a few days at Benevento. But the successes of Charles were so rapidly followed up, that our author, exact as he generally is, might not have thought it necessary to distinguish them in point of time; for this seems the best method of reconciling some little apparent inconsistency between him and the annalist. "Dying excommunicated, King Charles did not allow of his being buried in sacred ground, but he was interred near the bridge of Benevento; and on his grave there was cast a stone by every one of the army, whence there was formed a great mound of stones. But some have said that afterwards, by command of the Pope, the Bishop of Cosenza took up his body and sent it out of the kingdom, because it was the land of the church; and that it was buried by the river Verde, on the borders of the kingdom and of Campagna. This, however, we do not affirm."—G. Villani, "Hist.," lib. vii., cap. ix. Manfredi and his father are spoken

of by our poet in his "De Vulgari Eloquentia," lib. i., cap. 12, with singular commendation: "Siquidem illustres," &c., "Those illustrious worthies, Frederick the Emperor, and his well-born son Manfredi, manifested their nobility and uprightness of form, as long as fortune remained, by following pursuits worthy of men, and disdained those which are suited only to brutes. Such, therefore, as were of a lofty spirit, and graced with natural endowments, endeavoured to walk in the track which the majesty of such great princes had marked out for them: so that whatever was in their time attempted by eminent Italians, first made its appearance in the court of crowned sovereigns; and because Sicily was a royal throne, it came to pass that whatever was produced in the vernacular tongue by our predecessors was called Sicilian; which neither we nor our posterity shall be able to change."

² *Costanza*.—See "Paradise," canto iii. 121.

³ *My fair daughter*.—Costanza, the daughter of Manfredi, and wife of Peter III., King of Arragon, by whom she was mother to Frederick, King of Sicily, and James, King of Arragon. With the latter of these she was at Rome 1296. See G. Villani, lib. viii., cap. xviii., and notes to canto vii.

⁴ *Who then by Clement on my hunt was set*.—Pope Clement IV.



And I gazed upward round the stony height;
On the left hand appear'd to us a troop
Of spirits, that toward us moved their steps;
Yet moving seem'd not, they so slow approach'd.
Canto III., lines 56-59.

Near Benevento, by the heavy mole
 Protected; but the rain now drenches them,
 And the wind drives, out of the kingdom's bounds,
 Far as the stream of Verde,¹ where, with lights
 Extinguish'd, he removed them from their bed.
 Yet by their curse we are not so destroy'd,
 But that the eternal love may turn, while hope²
 Retains her verdant blossom. True it is,
 That such one as in contumacy dies
 Against the holy church, though he repent,
 Must wander thirty-fold for all the time
 In his presumption past; if such decree
 Be not by prayers of good men shorter made.
 Look therefore if thou canst advance my bliss;
 Revealing to my good Costanza how
 Thou hast beheld me, and beside, the terms
 Laid on me of that interdict; for here
 By means of those below much profit comes."

¹ *The stream of Verde.*—A river near Ascoli, that falls into the Tronto. The "extinguished lights" formed part of the ceremony at the interment of one excommunicated:

"Passa la mora di Manfrè, cui lava
 Il Verde."

Uberti, Dittamondo, lib. iii., cap. i.,
 as corrected by Perticari.

² *Hope.*—"Mentre che la speranza ha fior del verde." So Tasso, "*Gierusalemme Liberata*," canto xix., st. 53:

"Infìn che verde è fior di speme."