

## CANTO IV.

### ARGUMENT.

Dante and Virgil ascend the mountain of Purgatory, by a steep and narrow path pent in on each side by rock, till they reach a part of it that opens into a ledge or cornice. There seating themselves, and turning to the east, Dante wonders at seeing the sun on their left, the cause of which is explained to him by Virgil; and while they continue their discourse, a voice addresses them, at which they turn, and find several spirits behind the rock, and amongst the rest one named Belacqua, who had been known to our Poet on earth, and who tells that he is doomed to linger there on account of his having delayed his repentance to the last.

WHEN<sup>1</sup> by sensations of delight or pain,  
That any of our faculties hath seized,  
Entire the soul collects herself, it seems  
She is intent upon that power alone;  
And thus the error is disproved, which holds  
The soul not singly lighted in the breast.  
And therefore when as aught is heard or seen,  
That firmly keeps the soul toward it turn'd,  
Time passes, and a man perceives it not.  
For that, whereby we hearken, is one power;

<sup>1</sup> *When*.—It must be owned the beginning of this canto is somewhat obscure. Vellutello refers, for an elucidation of it, to the reasoning of Statius in the twenty-fifth canto. Perhaps some illustration may be derived from the following passage in the "Summa Theologiae" of Thomas Aquinas: "Some say that in addition to the vegetable soul, which was present from the first, there supervenes another soul, which is the sensitive; and again, in addition to that, another, which is the intellective. And so there are in man three souls, one of which exists potentially with regard to another: but this has been already disproved. And accordingly others say that that same soul, which at first was merely vegetative, is, through action of the seminal virtue, carried forward till it reaches to that point in which, being still the same, it nevertheless becomes sensitive; and at length the same, by an ulterior progression, is led on till it becomes intellective; not, indeed, through the seminal virtue acting in it, but by virtue of a superior

agent, that is, God, enlightening it from without. This opinion he next proceeds to confute. "Dicunt ergo quidam quod supra animam vegetabilem, quae primo inerat, supervenit alia anima, quae est sensitiva, supra illam iterum alia quae est intellectiva. Et sic sunt in homine tres animae, quarum una est in potentia ad aliam, quod supra improbatum est. Et ideo alii dicunt, quod illa eadem anima, quae primo fuit vegetativa tantum, postmodum per actionem virtutis, quae est in semine, perducitur ad hoc, ut ipsa eadem fiat sensitiva; et tandem ipsa eadem perducitur ad hoc, ut ipsa eadem fiat intellectiva, non quidem per virtutem activam seminis, sed per virtutem superioris agentis, scilicet Dei de foris illustrantis."—*Thom. Aquin. Opera*, Edit. Venet., 1595, tom. x., *Summa Theolog.*, 1ma Pars., Quaestio cxviii., Art. ii. See also "Lettere di Fra Guittone," 4to, Roma, 1745, p. 15; and Routh's note on the "Gorgias" of Plato, p. 451.

Another that, which the whole spirit hath:  
This is as it were bound, while that is free.

This found I true by proof, hearing that spirit,  
And wondering; for full fifty steps<sup>1</sup> aloft  
The sun had measured, unobserved of me,  
When we arrived where all with one accord  
The spirits shouted, "Here is what ye ask."

A larger aperture oft-times is stopt,  
With forked stake of thorn by villager,  
When the ripe grape imbrovns, than was the path  
By which my guide, and I behind him close,  
Ascended solitary, when that troop  
Departing left us. On Sanleo's<sup>2</sup> road  
Who journeys, or to Noli's<sup>3</sup> low descends,  
Or mounts Bismantua's<sup>4</sup> height, must use his feet;  
But here a man had need to fly, I mean  
With the swift wing<sup>5</sup> and plumes of high desire,  
Conducted by his aid, who gave me hope,  
And with light furnish'd to direct my way.

We through the broken rock ascended, close  
Pent on each side, while underneath, the ground  
Ask'd help of hands and feet. When we arrived  
Near on the highest ridge of the steep bank,  
Where the plain level open'd, I exclaim'd,  
"O Master! say, which way can we proceed."

He answer'd, "Let no step of thine recede.  
Behind me gain the mountain, till to us  
Some practised guide appear." That eminence  
Was lofty, that no eye might reach its point;  
And the side proudly rising, more than line<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Full fifty steps*.—Three hours and twenty minutes, fifteen degrees being reckoned to an hour.

<sup>2</sup> *Sanleo*.—A fortress on the summit of Montefeltro. The situation is described by Troya, "Veltro Allegorico," p. 11. It is a conspicuous object to travellers along the cornice on the riviera di Genoa.

<sup>3</sup> *Noli*.—In the Genoese territory, between Finale and Savona.

<sup>4</sup> *Bismantua*.—A steep mountain in the territory of Reggio.

<sup>5</sup> *With the swift wing*.—Compare "Paradise," canto xxxiii. 17.

<sup>6</sup> *More than line*.—It was much nearer to being perpendicular than horizontal.



From the mid quadrant to the centre drawn.  
 I, wearied, thus began: "Parent beloved!  
 Turn and behold how I remain alone,  
 If thou stay not." "My son!" he straight replied,  
 "Thus far put forth thy strength;" and to a track  
 Pointed, that, on this side projecting, round  
 Circles the hill. His words so spurr'd me on,  
 That I, behind him, clambering, forced myself,  
 Till my feet press'd the circuit plain beneath.  
 There both together seated, turn'd we round  
 To eastward, whence was our ascent: and oft  
 Many beside have with delight look'd back.

First on the nether shores I turn'd mine eyes,  
 Then raised them to the sun, and wondering mark'd  
 That from the left<sup>1</sup> it smote us. Soon perceived  
 That poet sage, how at the ear of light  
 Amazed<sup>2</sup> I stood, where 'twixt us and the north  
 Its course it enter'd. Whence he thus to me:  
 "Were Leda's offspring<sup>3</sup> now in company  
 Of that broad mirror, that high up and low  
 Imparts his light beneath, thou mightst behold  
 The ruddy Zodiac nearer to the Bears  
 Wheel, if its ancient course it not forsook.  
 How that may be, if thou wouldst think; within  
 Pondering, imagine Sion with this mount  
 Placed on the earth, so that to both be one  
 Horizon, and two hemispheres apart,

<sup>1</sup> *From the left.*—Vellutello observes an imitation of Lucan in this passage:

"Ignotum vobis, Arabes, venistis in orbem,  
 Umbras mirati nemorum non ire sinistras."

*Pharsalia*, lib. iii. 248.

<sup>2</sup> *Amazed.*—He wonders that being turned to the east he should see the sun on his left, since in all the regions on this side of the tropic of Cancer it is seen on the right of one who turns his face towards the east; not recollecting that he was now antipodal to Europe, from whence he had seen the sun taking an opposite course.

<sup>3</sup> *Were Leda's offspring.*—"As the constellation of the Gemini is nearer the Bears than Aries is, it is certain that if the sun, instead of being in Aries, had been in Gemini, both the sun and that portion of the Zodiac made 'ruddy' by the sun, would have been seen to 'wheel nearer to the Bears.' By the 'ruddy Zodiac' must necessarily be understood that portion of the Zodiac affected or made red by the sun; for the whole of the Zodiac never changes, nor appears to change, with respect to the remainder of the heavens."—*Lombardi.*