

CANTO VI.

ARGUMENT.

Many besides, who are in like case with those spoken of in the last Canto, beseech our Poet to obtain for them the prayers of their friends, when he shall be returned to this world. This moves him to express a doubt to his guide, how the dead can be profited by the prayers of the living; for the solution of which doubt he is referred to Beatrice. Afterwards he meets with Sordello, the Mantuan, whose affection, shown to Virgil, his countryman, leads Dante to break forth into an invective against the unnatural divisions with which Italy, and more especially Florence, was distracted.

WHEN from their game of dice men separate,
 He who hath lost remains in sadness fix'd,
 Revolving in his mind¹ what luckless throws
 He cast: but, meanwhile, all the company
 Go with the other; one before him runs,
 And one behind his mantle twitches, one
 Fast by his side bids him remember him.
 He stops not; and each one, to whom his hand
 Is stretch'd, well knows he bids him stand aside;
 And thus² he from the press defends himself.
 E'en such was I in that close-crowding throng;
 And turning so my face around to all,
 And promising, I 'scaped from it with pains.
 Here of Arezzo him³ I saw, who fell

¹ *Revolving in his mind.*—

“Riman dolente

Ripetendo le volte, e triste imparà.”

Lombardi explains this: “That the loser remains by himself, and taking up the dice, casts them over again, as if to learn how he may throw the numbers he could wish to come up.” There is something very natural in this; but whether the sense can be fairly deduced from the words is another question.

² *And thus.*—The late Archdeacon Fisher pointed out to me a passage in the “Novela de la Gitanilla” of Cervantes, ed. Valentia, 1797, p. 12, from which it appears that it was usual for money to be given to bystanders at play by winners; and as he well re-

marked: “Dante is therefore describing, with his usual power of observation, what he had often seen, the shuffling, boon-denying exit of the successful gamester.”

³ *Of Arezzo him.*—Benincasa of Arezzo, eminent for his skill in jurisprudence, who, having condemned to death Turrino da Turrita, brother of Ghino di Tacco, for his robberies in Maremma, was murdered by Ghino, in an apartment of his own house, in the presence of many witnesses. Ghino was not only suffered to escape in safety, but (as the commentators inform us) obtained so high a reputation by the liberality with which he was accustomed to dispense the fruits of his plunder, and treated

By Ghino's cruel arm; and him beside,¹
 Who in his chase was swallow'd by the stream.
 Here Frederic Novello,² with his hand
 Stretch'd forth, entreated; and of Pisa he,³
 Who put the good Marzucco to such proof
 Of constancy. Count Orso⁴ I beheld;
 And from its frame a soul dismiss'd for spite
 And envy, as it said, but for no crime;
 I speak of Peter de la Brosse:⁵ and here,
 While she yet lives, that Lady of Brabant,
 Let her beware; lest for so false a deed
 She herd with worse than these. When I was freed
 From all those spirits, who pray'd for others' prayers
 To hasten on their state of blessedness;
 Straight I began: "O thou, my luminary
 It seems expressly in thy text⁶ denied,
 That heaven's supreme decree can ever bend
 To supplication: yet with this design
 Do these entreat. Can then their hope be vain?
 Or is thy saying not to me reveal'd?"

those who fell into his hands with so much courtesy, that he was afterwards invited to Rome, and knighted by Boniface VIII. A story is told of him by Boccaccio, *Giorn. x.*, Nov. 2.

¹ *Him beside.*—Cione, or Ciaccio de' Tarlati of Arezzo. He is said to have been carried by his horse into the Arno, and there drowned, while he was in pursuit of certain of his enemies.

² *Frederic Novello.*—Son of the Conti Guido da Battifolle, and slain by one of the family of Bostoli.

³ *Of Pisa he.*—Farinata de' Scornigiani of Pisa. His father Marzucco, who had entered the order of the Frati Minori, so entirely overcame the feelings of resentment, that he even kissed the hands of the slayer of his son, and, as he was following the funeral, exhorted his kinsmen to reconciliation. The eighteenth and thirtieth in the collection of Guittone d' Arezzo's Letters are addressed to Marzucco. The latter is in verse.

⁴ *Count Orso.*—Son of Napoleone da Cerbaia, slain by Alberto da Mangona, his uncle.

⁵ *Peter de la Brosse.*—Secretary of Philip III. of France. The courtiers, envying the high place which

he held in the king's favour, prevailed on Mary of Brabant to charge him falsely with an attempt upon her person; for which supposed crime he suffered death. So say the Italian commentators. Henault represents the matter very differently: "Pierre de la Brosse, formerly barber to St. Louis, afterwards the favourite of Philip, fearing the too great attachment of the king for his wife Mary, accuses this princess of having poisoned Louis, eldest son of Philip, by his first marriage. This calumny is discovered by a nun of Nivelles in Flanders. La Brosse is hung."—*Abregé Chron.*, 1275, &c. The Deputati, or those deputed to write annotations on the "Decameron," suppose that Boccaccio, in the *Giornata ii.*, Novella 9, took the story from this passage in Dante, only concealing the real names and changing the incidents in some parts, in order not to wound the feelings of those whom, as it was believed, these incidents had so lately befallen. Ediz. Giunti, 1573, p. 40.

⁶ *In thy text.*—He refers to Virgil, "*Æneid*," lib. vi. 376:

"Desine fata deum flecti sperare precando."

He thus to me: "Both what I write is plain,
 And these deceived not in their hope; if well
 Thy mind consider, that the sacred height
 Of judgment¹ doth not stoop, because love's flame
 In a short moment all fulfills, which he,
 Who sojourns here, in right should satisfy.
 Besides, when I this point concluded thus,
 By praying no defect could be supplied;
 Because the prayer had none access to God.
 Yet in this deep suspicion rest thou not
 Contented, unless she assure thee so,
 Who betwixt truth and mind infuses light:
 I know not if thou take me right; I mean
 Beatrice. Her thou shalt behold above,²
 Upon this mountain's crown, fair seat of joy."

Then I: "Sir! let us mend our speed; for now
 I tire not as before: and lo! the hill³
 Stretches its shadow far." He answer'd thus:
 "Our progress with this day shall be as much
 As we may now dispatch; but otherwise
 Than thou supposest is the truth. For there
 Thou canst not be, ere thou once more behold
 Him back returning, who behind the steep
 Is now so hidden, that, as erst, his beam
 Thou dost not break. But lo! a spirit there
 Stands solitary, and toward us looks:
 It will instruct us in the speediest way."

We soon approach'd it. O thou Lombard spirit!
 How didst thou stand, in high abstracted mood,
 Scarce moving with slow dignity thine eyes.
 It spoke not aught, but let us onward pass,
 Eyeing us as a lion on his watch.⁴

¹ *The sacred height of judgment.*—So Shakespeare, "*Measure for Measure*," act ii., sc. 2:

"If he, which is the top of judgment."

² *Above.*—See "*Purgatory*," c. xxx., v. 32.

³ *The hill.*—It was now past the noon.

⁴ *Eyeing us as a lion on his watch.*—"A guisa di leon quando si posa." A line taken by Tasso, "*Gerusalemme Liberata*," canto x., st. 56.