

CANTO VII.

ARGUMENT.

The approach of night hindering further ascent, Sordello conducts our Poet apart to an eminence, from whence they behold a pleasant recess, in form of a flowery valley, scooped out of the mountain; where are many famous spirits, and among them the Emperor Rodolph, Ottocar, King of Bohemia, Philip III. of France, Henry of Navarre, Peter III. of Arragon, Charles I. of Naples, Henry III. of England, and William, Marquis of Montferrat.

AFTER their courteous greetings joyfully
Seven times exchanged, Sordello backward drew
Exclaiming, "Who are ye?"—"Before this mount
By spirits worthy of ascent to God
Was sought, my bones had by Octavius' care
Been buried. I am Virgil; for no sin
Deprived of heaven, except for lack of faith."
So answer'd him in few my gentle guide.

As one, who aught before him suddenly
Beholding, whence his wonder riseth, cries,
"It is, yet is not," wavering in belief;
Such he appear'd; then downward bent his eyes,
And, drawing near with reverential step,
Caught him, where one of mean estate might clasp
His lord.¹ "Glory of Latium!" he exclaim'd,
"In whom our tongue its utmost power display'd;
Boast of my honour'd birth-place! what desert²
Of mine, what favour, rather, undeserved,
Shows thee to me? If I to hear that voice
Am worthy, say if from below thou comest,

¹ Where one of mean estate might clasp his lord.—
So Ariosto, "Orlando Furioso," c. xxiv., st. 19:
"E l'abbracciare, ove il maggior s'abbraccia,
Col capo nudo e col ginocchio chino."
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² What desert.—So Frezzi:
"Qual grazia, o qual destin m' ha fatto degno
Che io ti veggia."
Il Quadriregio, lib. iv., cap. 9.

And from what cloister's pale."—"Through every orb
Of that sad region," he replied, "thus far
Am I arrived, by heavenly influence led:
And with such aid I come. Not for my doing,¹
But for not doing, have I lost the sight
Of that high Sun, whom thou desirest, and who
By me too late was known. There is a place²
There underneath, not made by torments sad,
But by dun shades alone; where mourning's voice
Sounds not of anguish sharp, but breathes in sighs.
There I with little innocents abide,
Who by death's fangs were bitten, ere exempt
From human taint. There I with those abide,
Who the three holy virtues³ put not on,
But understood the rest,⁴ and without blame
Follow'd them all. But, if thou know'st, and canst,
Direct us how we soonest may arrive,
Where Purgatory its true beginning takes."

He answer'd thus: "We have no certain place
Assign'd us: upwards I may go, or round.
Far as I can, I join thee for thy guide.
But thou beholdest now how day declines;
And upwards to proceed by night, our power
Excels: therefore it may be well to choose
A place of pleasant sojourn. To the right
Some spirits sit apart retired. If thou
Consentest, I to these will lead thy steps:
And thou wilt know them, not without delight."

"How chances this?" was answer'd: "whoso wish'd
To ascend by night, would he be thence debarr'd
By other, or through his own weakness fail?"

¹ Not for my doing.—I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Lyell for pointing out to me that three lines of the original were here omitted in the former editions of this translation.

² There is a place.—Limbo. See "Hell," c. iv. 24.

³ The three holy virtues.—Faith, Hope, and Charity.

⁴ The rest.—Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance.

The good Sordello then along the ground
Trailing his finger, spoke: "Only this line¹
Thou shalt not overpass, soon as the sun
Hath disappear'd; not that aught else impedes
Thy going upwards, save the shades of night.
These, with the want of power, perplex the will.
With them thou haply mightst return beneath,
Or to and fro around the mountain's side
Wander, while day is in the horizon shut."

My master straight, as wondering at his speech,
Exclaim'd: "Then lead us quickly, where thou sayst
That, while we stay, we may enjoy delight."

A little space we were removed from thence,
When I perceived the mountain hollow'd out,
Even as large valleys² hollow'd out on earth.

"That way," the escorting spirit cried, "we go,
Where in a bosom the high bank recedes:
And thou await renewal of the day."

Betwixt the steep and plain, a crooked path
Led us traverse into the ridge's side,
Where more than half the sloping edge expires.
Refulgent gold, and silver thrice refined,
And scarlet grain and ceruse, Indian wood³
Of lucid dye serene, fresh emeralds⁴
But newly broken, by the herbs and flowers

¹ *Only this line.*—"Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth."—*John* xii. 35.

² *As large valleys.*—"Viatores enim per viam rec-tam dum ambulant, campum juxta viam cernentes spatiosum et pulchrum, oblique itineris, dicunt intra se, Iter per campum istum faciamus," &c.—*Alberici Visio*, § 28.

³ *Indian wood.*—

"Indico legno lucido e sereno."

It is a little uncertain what is meant by this. Indigo, although it is extracted from a herb, seems the most

likely. Monti, in his "Proposta," maintains it to be ebony.

⁴ *Fresh emeralds.*—

"Under foot the violet,
Crocus, and hyacinth with rich inlay
Broider'd the ground, more colour'd than with stone
Of costliest emblem."

Milton, Paradise Lost, b. iv. 703.

"Zaffir, rubini, oro, topazj, e perle,
E diamanti, e crisoliti e giacinti
Potriano i fiori assimigliar, che per le
Liete piagge v'avea l'aura dipinti;
Si verdi l'erbe, che potendo averle
Qua giù ne foran gli smeraldi vinti."

Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, c. xxxiv., st. 49.

Placed in that fair recess, in colour all
Had been surpassed, as great surpasses less.
Nor nature only there lavish'd her hues,
But of the sweetness¹ of a thousand smells
A rare and undistinguish'd fragrance made.

"Salve Regina,"² on the grass and flowers,
Here chanting, I beheld those spirits sit,
Who not beyond the valley could be seen.

"Before the westering sun sink to his bed,"
Began the Mantuan, who our steps had turn'd,
"Mid those, desire not that I lead ye on.
For from this eminence ye shall discern
Better the acts and visages of all,
Than, in the nether vale, among them mix'd.
He, who sits high above the rest, and seems
To have neglected that he should have done,
And to the others' song moves not his lip,
The Emperor Rodolph³ call, who might have heal'd
The wounds whereof fair Italy hath died,
So that by others she revives but slowly.
He, who with kindly visage comforts him,
Sway'd in that country,⁴ where the water springs,
That Moldaw's river to the Elbe, and Elbe
Rolls to the ocean: Ottocar⁵ his name:
Who in his swaddling clothes was of more worth
Than Wincellaus his son, a bearded man,
Pamper'd with rank luxuriousness and ease.

¹ *The sweetness.*—

"E quella ai fiori, ai pomi, e alla verzura
Gli odor diversi depredando giva,
E di tutti faceva una mistura,
Che di soavità l'anima notriva."—*Ibid.*, st. 51.

² *Salve Regina.*—The beginning of a prayer to the Virgin. It is sufficient here to observe, that in similar instances I shall either preserve the original Latin words or translate them, as it may seem best to suit the purpose of the verse.

³ *The Emperor Rodolph.*—See the last canto, v. 104. He died in 1291.

⁴ *That country.*—Bohemia.

⁵ *Ottocar.*—King of Bohemia, who was killed in the battle of Marchfield, fought with Rodolph, August 26, 1278. Wincellaus II., his son, who succeeded him in the kingdom of Bohemia, died in 1305. The latter is again taxed with luxury in the "Paradise," xix. 123.