

CANTO X.

ARGUMENT.

Being admitted at the gate of Purgatory, our Poets ascend a winding path up the rock till they reach an open and level space that extends each way round the mountain. On the side that rises, and which is of white marble, are seen artfully engraven many stories of humility, which whilst they are contemplating, there approach the souls of those who expiate the sin of pride, and who are bent down beneath the weight of heavy stones.

WHEN we had past the threshold of the gate,
(Which the soul's ill affection doth disuse,
Making the crooked seem the straighter path,)
I heard its closing sound. Had mine eyes turn'd,
For that offence what plea might have avail'd?

We mounted up the riven rock, that wound:¹
On either side alternate, as the wave
Flies and advances. "Here some little art
Behoves us," said my leader, "that our steps
Observe the varying flexure of the path."

Thus we so slowly sped, that with cleft orb
The moon once more o'erhangs her watery couch,
Ere we that strait have threaded. But when free,
We came, and open, where the mount above
One solid mass retires; I spent with toil,²
And both uncertain of the way, we stood,
Upon a plain more lonesome than the roads

¹ *That wound*.—Venturi justly observes that the Padre d'Aquino has misrepresented the sense of this passage in his translation:

"Dabat ascensum tendentibus ultra
Scissa tremensque silex, tenuique erratica motu."

The verb "muover" is used in the same signification in the "Inferno," canto xviii. 21:

"Così da imo della roccia scogli
Moven."

"From the rock's low base
Thus flinty paths advanced."

In neither place is actual motion intended to be expressed.

² *I spent with toil*.—Dante only was wearied, because he only had the weight of a bodily frame to encumber him.

That traverse desert wilds. From whence the brink
Borders upon vacuity, to foot
Of the steep bank that rises still, the space
Had measured thrice the stature of a man:
And, distant as mine eye could wing its flight,
To leftward now and now to right dispatch'd,
That cornice equal in extent appear'd.

Not yet our feet had on that summit moved,
When I discover'd that the bank, around,
Whose proud uprising all ascent denied,
Was marble white; and so exactly wrought
With quaintest sculpture, that not there alone
Had Polycleetus, but e'en nature's self
Been shamed. The angel (who came down to earth
With tidings of the peace so many years
Wept for in vain, that oped the heavenly gates
From their long interdict) before us seem'd,
In a sweet act, so sculptured to the life,
He look'd no silent image. One had sworn
He had said "Hail!"¹ for she was imaged there,
By whom the key did open to God's love;
And in her act as sensibly imprest
That word, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord,"
As figure seal'd on wax. "Fix not thy mind
On one place only," said the guide beloved,
Who had me near him on that part where lies
The heart of man. My sight forthwith I turn'd,
And mark'd, behind the virgin mother's form,
Upon that side where he that moved me stood,
Another story graven on the rock.

I past athwart the bard, and drew me near,

¹ *Hail*.

"On whom the angel *Hail*
Bestow'd, the holy salutation used
Long after to blest Mary, second Eve."

Milton, Paradise Lost, v. 387.

"The basso relievo on the border of the second rock in Purgatory furnished the idea of the 'Annunziata,' painted by Marcello Venusti from his (Michael Angelo's) design in the sacristy of St. Giovanni Lateran."—*Fuseli, Lecture iii.*, note.

That it might stand more aptly for my view.
 There, in the self-same marble, were engraved
 The cart and kine, drawing the sacred ark,
 That from unbidden office awes mankind.¹
 Before it came much people; and the whole
 Parted in seven quires. One sense cried "Nay,"
 Another, "Yes, they sing." Like doubt arose
 Betwixt the eye and smell, from the curl'd fume
 Of incense breathing up the well-wrought toil.
 Preceding² the blest vessel, onward came,
 With light dance leaping, girt in humble guise,
 Israel's sweet harper: in that hap he seem'd
 Less, and yet more, than kingly. Opposite,
 At a great palace, from the lattice forth
 Look'd Michol, like a lady full of scorn
 And sorrow. To behold the tablet next,
 Which, at the back of Michol, whitely shone,
 I moved me. There, was storied on the rock
 The exalted glory of the Roman prince,
 Whose mighty worth moved Gregory³ to earn
 His mighty conquest, Trajan the Emperor.⁴
 A widow at his bridle stood, attired
 In tears and mourning. Round about them troop'd
 Full throng of knights; and overhead in gold

¹ *That from unbidden office awes mankind.*—"And when they came to Nachon's threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God."—2 Sam. vi. 6, 7.

² *Preceding.*—"And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod."—2 Sam. vi. 14.

³ *Whose mighty worth moved Gregory.*—St. Gregory's prayers are said to have delivered Trajan from hell. See "Paradise," canto xx. 40.

⁴ *Trajan the Emperor.*—For this story, Landino refers to two writers, whom he calls "Helinando," of France—by whom he means Elinand, a monk and

chronicler in the reign of Philip Augustus—and "Polyerato," of England, by whom is meant John of Salisbury, author of the "Polyeraticus de Curiali-um Nugis," in the twelfth century. The passage in the text I find nearly a translation from that work, lib. v., c. 8. The original appears to be in Dio Cassius, where it is told of the Emperor Hadrian, lib. lxix., ἀμείλει γυναῖκος, κ. τ. λ. "when a woman appeared to him with a suit, as he was on a journey, at first he answered her, 'I have no leisure;' but she crying out to him, 'then reign no longer,' he turned about, and heard her cause." Lombardi refers also to Johannes Diaconus. "Vita S. Gregor.," lib. ii., cap. 44; the Euchology of the Greeks, cap. 96; and St. Thomas Aquinas, "Supplem. Quæst." 73, art. 5 and 5. Compare Fazio degli Uberti, "Dittamondo," lib. ii., cap. 6.