

"Turn, Beatrice!" was their song: "Oh! turn
 Thy saintly sight on this thy faithful one,
 Who, to behold thee, many a wearisome pace
 Hath measured. Gracious at our prayer, vouchsafe
 Unveil to him thy cheeks: that he may mark
 Thy second beauty, now conceal'd." O splendour!
 O sacred light eternal! who is he,
 So pale with musing in Pierian shades,
 Or with that fount so lavishly imbued,
 Whose spirit should not fail him in the essay
 To represent thee such as thou didst seem,
 When under cope of the still-chiming heaven
 Thou gavest to open air thy charms reveal'd?

CANTO XXXII.

ARGUMENT.

Dante is warned not to gaze too fixedly on Beatrice. The procession moves on, accompanied by Matilda, Statius, and Dante, till they reach an exceeding lofty tree, where divers strange chances befall.

MINE eyes with such an eager coveting
 Were bent to rid them of their ten years' thirst,¹
 No other sense was waking: and e'en they
 Were fenced on either side from heed of aught;
 So tangled, in its custom'd toils, that smile
 Of saintly brightness drew me to itself:
 When forcibly, toward the left, my sight
 The sacred virgins turn'd; for from their lips
 I heard the warning sounds: "Too fix'd a gaze!"²
 Awhile my vision labour'd; as when late
 Upon the o'erstrain'd eyes the sun hath smote:
 But soon,³ to lesser object, as the view
 Was now recover'd (lesser in respect
 To that excess of sensible, whence late
 I had perforce been sunder'd), on their right
 I mark'd that glorious army wheel, and turn,
 Against the sun and sevenfold lights, their front.
 As when, their bucklers for protection raised,
 A well-ranged troop, with portly banners curl'd,

¹ *Their ten years' thirst.*—Beatrice had been dead ten years.

² *Too fix'd a gaze.*—The allegorical interpretation of Vellutello, whether it be considered as justly inferable from the text or not, conveys so useful a lesson, that it deserves our notice. "The understanding is sometimes so intently engaged in contemplating the light of divine truth in the Scriptures, that

it becomes dazzled, and is made less capable of attaining such knowledge, than if it had sought after it with greater moderation."

³ *But soon.*—As soon as his sight was recovered, so as to bear the view of that glorious procession, which, splendid as it was, was yet less so than Beatrice, by whom his vision had been overpowered, &c.

Wheel circling, ere the whole can change their ground;
 E'en thus the goodly regiment of heaven,
 Proceeding, all did pass us ere the car
 Had sloped his beam. Attendant at the wheels
 The damsels turn'd; and on the Gryphon moved
 The sacred burden, with a pace so smooth,
 No feather on him trembled. The fair dame,
 Who through the wave had drawn me, companioned
 By Statius and myself, pursued the wheel,
 Whose orbit, rolling, mark'd a lesser arch.

Through the high wood, now void (the more her blame,
 Who by the serpent was beguiled), I pass'd,
 With step in cadence to the harmony
 Angelic. Onward had we moved, as far,
 Perchance, as arrow at three several flights
 Full wing'd had sped, when from her station down
 Descended Beatrice. With one voice
 All murmur'd "Adam;" circling next a plant¹
 Despoil'd of flowers and leaf, on every bough.
 Its tresses,² spreading more as more they rose,
 Were such, as 'midst their forest wilds, for height,
 The Indians³ might have gazed at. "Blessed thou,
 Gryphon!⁴ whose beak hath never pluck'd that tree
 Pleasant to taste: for hence the appetite
 Was warp'd to evil." Round the stately trunk

¹ *A plant*.—Lombardi has conjectured, with much probability, that this tree is not (as preceding commentators had supposed) merely intended to represent the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but that the Roman empire is figured by it. Among the maxims maintained by our poet, as the same commentator observes, were these: that one monarchy had been willed by Providence, and was necessary for universal peace; and that this monarchy, by right of justice and by the divine ordinance, belonged to the Roman people only. His *Treatise de Monarchia* was written, indeed, to inculcate these maxims, and to prove that the temporal monarchy depends immediately on God, and should be kept as distinct as possible from the authority of the Pope.

² *Its tresses*.—"I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great."—Dan. iv. 10.

³ *The Indians*.—

"Quos oceano proprior gerit India lucos."

Virgil, *Georgics*, lib. ii. 122.

"Such as at this day to Indians known."

Milton, *Paradise Lost*, b. ix. 1102.

⁴ *Blessed thou, Gryphon!*—Our Saviour's submission to the Roman empire appears to be intended, and particularly his injunction, "to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's."

Thus shouted forth the rest, to whom return'd
 The animal twice-gender'd: "Yea! for so
 The generation of the just are saved."
 And turning to the chariot-pole, to foot
 He drew it of the widow'd branch, and bound
 There, left unto the stock¹ whereon it grew.

As when large floods of radiance² from above
 Stream, with that radiance mingled, which ascends
 Next after setting of the scaly sign,
 Our plants then burgein, and each wears anew
 His wonted colours, ere the sun have yoked
 Beneath another star his flamy steeds;
 Thus putting forth a hue more faint than rose,
 And deeper than the violet, was renew'd
 The plant, erewhile in all its branches bare.
 Unearthly was the hymn, which then arose.
 I understood it not, nor to the end
 Endured the harmony. Had I the skill
 To pencil forth how closed the un pitying eyes³
 Slumbering, when Syrinx warbled (eyes that paid
 So dearly for their watching), then, like a painter,
 That with a model paints, I might design
 The manner of my falling into sleep.
 But feign who will the slumber cunningly,
 I pass it by to when I waked; and tell,
 How suddenly a flash of splendour rent
 The curtain of my sleep, and one cries out,
 "Arise: what dost thou?" As the chosen three,

¹ *There, left unto the stock*.—Dante here seems, I think, to intimate what he has attempted to prove at the conclusion of the second book "*De Monarchia*," namely, that our Saviour, by his suffering under the sentence, not of Herod, but of Pilate, who was the delegate of the Roman emperor, acknowledged and confirmed the supremacy of that emperor over the whole world; for if, as he argues, all mankind were become sinners through the sin of Adam, no punishment, that was inflicted by one who

had a right of jurisdiction over less than the whole human race, could have been sufficient to satisfy for the sins of all men. See note to "*Paradise*," c. vi. 89.

² *When large floods of radiance*.—When the sun enters into Aries, the constellation next to that of the Fish.

³ *The un pitying eyes*.—See Ovid, "*Metamorphoses*," lib. i. 689.