

### CANTO III.

#### ARGUMENT.

In the moon Dante meets with Piccarda, the sister of Forese, who tells him that this planet is allotted to those who, after having made profession of chastity and a religious life, had been compelled to violate their vows; and she then points out to him the spirit of the Empress Costanza.

THAT sun,<sup>1</sup> which erst with love my bosom warm'd,  
Had of fair truth unveil'd the sweet aspect,  
By proof of right, and of the false reproof;  
And I, to own myself convinced and free  
Of doubt, as much as needed, raised my head  
Erect for speech. But soon a sight appear'd,  
Which, so intent to mark it, held me fix'd,  
That of confession I no longer thought.

As through translucent and smooth glass, or wave  
Clear and unmoved, and flowing not so deep  
As that its bed is dark, the shape returns  
So faint of our impictured lineaments,  
That, on white forehead set, a pearl as strong  
Comes to the eye; such saw I many a face,  
All stretch'd to speak; from whence I straight conceived,  
Delusion<sup>2</sup> opposite to that, which raised,  
Between the man and fountain, amorous flame.

Sudden, as I perceived them, deeming these  
Reflected semblances, to see of whom  
They were, I turn'd mine eyes, and nothing saw;  
Then turn'd them back, directed on the light  
Of my sweet guide, who, smiling, shot forth beams

<sup>1</sup> That sun.—Beatrice.

<sup>2</sup> Delusion.—“An error the contrary to that of

Narcissus; because he mistook a shadow for a substance; I, a substance for a shadow.”

From her celestial eyes. “Wonder not thou,”  
She cried, “at this my smiling, when I see  
Thy childish judgment; since not yet on truth  
It rests the foot, but, as it still is wont,  
Makes thee fall back in unsound vacancy.  
True substances are these, which thou behold'st,  
Hither through failure of their vow exiled.  
But speak thou with them; listen, and believe,  
That the true light, which fills them with desire,  
Permits not from its beams their feet to stray.”

Straight to the shadow, which for converse seem'd  
Most earnest, I address'd me: and began  
As one by over-eagerness perplex'd:  
“O spirit, born for joy! who in the rays  
Of life eternal, of that sweetness know'st  
The flavour, which, not tasted, passes far  
All apprehension; me it well would please,  
If thou wouldst tell me of thy name, and this  
Your station here.” Whence she with kindness prompt,  
And eyes glistening with smiles: “Our charity,  
To any wish by justice introduced,  
Bars not the door; no more than she above,  
Who would have all her court be like herself.  
I was a virgin sister in the earth:  
And if thy mind observe me well, this form,  
With such addition graced of loveliness,  
Will not conceal me long; but thou wilt know  
Piccarda,<sup>1</sup> in the tardiest sphere thus placed,  
Here 'mid these other blessed also blest.  
Our hearts, whose high affections burn alone  
With pleasure from the Holy Spirit conceived,  
Admitted to his order, dwell in joy.  
And this condition, which appears so low,

<sup>1</sup> Piccarda.—The sister of Corso Donati, and of Forese, whom we have seen in the “Purgatory,”

canto xxiii. Petrarch has been supposed to allude to this lady in his “Triumph of Chastity,” v. 160, &c.



Is for this cause assign'd us, that our vows  
Were, in some part, neglected and made void."

Whence I to her replied: "Something divine  
Beams in your countenances wondrous fair;  
From former knowledge quite transmuting you.  
Therefore to recollect was I so slow.  
But what thou say'st hath to my memory  
Given now such aid, that to retrace your forms  
Is easier. Yet inform me, ye, who here  
Are happy; long ye for a higher place,  
More to behold, and more in love to dwell?"

She with those other spirits gently smiled;  
Then answer'd with such gladness, that she seem'd  
With love's first flame to glow: "Brother! our will  
Is, in composure, settled by the power  
Of charity, who makes us will alone  
What we possess, and nought beyond desire:  
If we should wish to be exalted more,  
Then must our wishes jar with the high will  
Of him, who sets us here; which in these orbs  
Thou wilt confess not possible, if here  
To be in charity must needs befall,  
And if her nature well thou contemplate.  
Rather it is inherent in this state  
Of blessedness, to keep ourselves within  
The divine will, by which our wills with his  
Are one. So that as we, from step to step,  
Are placed throughout this kingdom, pleases all,  
Even as our King, who in us plants his will;  
And in his will is our tranquillity:  
It is the mighty ocean, whither tends  
Whatever it creates and nature makes."

Then saw I clearly how each spot in heaven  
Is Paradise, though with like gracious dew  
The supreme virtue shower not over all.

But as it chances, if one sort of food

Hath satiated, and of another still  
The appetite remains, that this is ask'd,  
And thanks for that return'd; even so did I,  
In word and motion, bent from her to learn  
What web it was,<sup>1</sup> through which she had not drawn  
The shuttle to its point. She thus began:  
"Exalted worth and perfectness of life  
The Lady<sup>2</sup> higher up inshrine in heaven,  
By whose pure laws upon your nether earth  
The robe and veil they wear; to that intent,  
That e'en till death they may keep watch, or sleep,  
With their great bridegroom, who accepts each vow,  
Which to his gracious pleasure love conforms.  
I from the world, to follow her, when young  
Escaped; and, in her vesture mantling me,  
Made promise of the way her sect enjoins.  
Thereafter men, for ill than good more apt,  
Forth snatch'd me from the pleasant cloister's pale.  
God knows<sup>3</sup> how, after that, my life was framed,  
This other splendid shape, which thou behold'st  
At my right side, burning with all the light  
Of this our orb, what of myself I tell  
May to herself apply. From her, like me  
A sister, with like violence were torn  
The saintly folds, that shaded her fair brows.

<sup>1</sup> *In word and motion, bent from her to learn what web it was.*—"What vow of religious life it was that she had been hindered from completing, had been compelled to break."

<sup>2</sup> *The Lady.*—St. Clare, the foundress of the order called after her. She was born of opulent and noble parents at Assisi, in 1193, and died in 1253. See "Biogr. Univ." t. i., p. 598, 8vo, Paris, 1813.

<sup>3</sup> *God knows.*—Rodolfo da Tossignano, "Hist. Seraph. Relig." P. i., p. 138, as cited by Lombardi, relates the following legend of Piccarda:—"Her brother Corso, inflamed with rage against his virgin sister, having joined with him Farinata, an infamous assassin, and twelve other abandoned ruffians, entered the monastery by a ladder, and carried away

his sister forcibly to his own house; and then, tearing off her religious habit, compelled her to go in a secular garment to her nuptials. Before the spouse of Christ came together with her new husband, she knelt down before a crucifix and recommended her virginity to Christ. Soon after her whole body was smitten with leprosy, so as to strike grief and horror into the beholders; and thus in a few days, through the divine disposal, she passed with a palm of virginity to the Lord." Perhaps, adds the worthy Franciscan, our poet, not being able to certify himself entirely of this occurrence, has chosen to pass it over discreetly, by making Piccarda say—

"God knows how, after that, my life was framed."



E'en when she to the world again was brought  
In spite of her own will and better wont,  
Yet not for that the bosom's inward veil  
Did she renounce. This is the luminary  
Of mighty Constance,<sup>1</sup> who from that loud blast,  
Which blew the second<sup>2</sup> over Suabia's realm,  
That power produced, which was the third and last."

She ceased from further talk, and then began  
"Ave Maria" singing; and with that song  
Vanish'd, as heavy substance through deep wave.

Mine eye, that, far as it was capable,  
Pursued her, when in dimness she was lost,  
Turn'd to the mark, where greater want impell'd,  
And bent on Beatrice all its gaze.  
But she, as lightning, beam'd upon my looks;  
So that the sight sustain'd it not at first.  
Whence I to question her became less prompt.

<sup>1</sup> *Constance*. — Daughter of Ruggieri, King of Sicily, who being taken by force out of a monastery where she had professed, was married to the Emperor Henry VI., and by him was mother to Frederick II. She was fifty years old or more at the time, and "because it was not credited that she could have a child at that age, she was delivered in a pavilion, and it was given out that any lady who pleased, was at liberty to see her. Many came, and saw her; and the suspicion ceased."—*Ricordano Malaspina*, in *Muratori, Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, t. viii., p. 939; and G. Villani, in the same

words, "Hist.," lib. v., c. xvi. The French translator above mentioned speaks of her having poisoned her husband. The death of Henry VI. is recorded in the "Chronicon Siciliae," by an anonymous writer (*Muratori*, t. x.), but not a word of his having been poisoned by Constance; and *Ricordano Malaspina* even mentions her decease as happening before that of her husband, Henry V., for so this author, with some others, terms him.

<sup>2</sup> *The second*.—Henry VI., son of Frederick I., was the second emperor of the house of Suabia; and his son, Frederick II., "the third and last."

## CANTO IV.

### ARGUMENT.

While they still continue in the moon, Beatrice removes certain doubts which Dante had conceived respecting the place assigned to the blessed, and respecting the will absolute or conditional. He inquires whether it is possible to make satisfaction for a vow broken.

**B**ETWEEN two kinds of food,<sup>1</sup> both equally  
Remote and tempting, first a man might die  
Of hunger, ere he one could freely chuse.  
E'en so would stand a lamb between the maw  
Of two fierce wolves, in dread of both alike:  
E'en so between two deer<sup>2</sup> a dog would stand.  
Wherefore, if I was silent, fault nor praise  
I to myself impute; by equal doubts  
Held in suspense; since of necessity  
It happen'd. Silent was I, yet desire  
Was painted in my looks; and thus I spake  
My wish more earnestly than language could.

As Daniel, when the haughty king he freed<sup>3</sup>  
From ire, that spurr'd him on to deeds unjust  
And violent; so did Beatrice then.

"Well I discern," she thus her words address'd,  
"How thou art drawn by each of these desires;<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Between two kinds of food*.—"Si aliqua dico sunt penitus aequalia, non magis movetur homo ad unum quam ad aliud; sicut famelicus, si habet cibum aequaliter appetibilem in diversis partibus, et secundum aequalem distantiam, non magis movetur ad unum quam ad alterum."—*Thomas Aquinas, Summ. Theolog.*

<sup>2</sup> *Between two deer*.—

"Tigris ut, auditis, diversa valle duorum,  
Extimulata fame, mugitibus armentorum,  
Nescit utro potius ruat, et ruere ardet utroque."  
*Ovid, Metamorphoses*, lib. v. 166.

<sup>3</sup> *As Daniel, when the haughty king he freed*.—See *Daniel ii.* Beatrice did for Dante what Daniel did for Nebuchadnezzar, when he freed the king from the uncertainty respecting his dream, which had enraged him against the Chaldeans. Lombardi conjectures that "Fe si Beatrice" should be read, instead of "Fessi Beatrice;" and his conjecture has since been confirmed by the Monte Casino MS.

<sup>4</sup> *How thou art drawn by each of these desires*.—His desire to have each of the doubts which Beatrice mentions resolved.