

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,¹ who from that loud blast,
Which blew the second² 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.

¹ *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.

² *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.

BETWEEN two kinds of food,¹ 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 deer² 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 freed³
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;⁴

¹ *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.*

² *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.

³ *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.

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

So that thy anxious thought is in itself
Bound up and stifled, nor breathes freely forth.
Thou arguest: if the good intent remain,
What reason that another's violence
Should stint the measure of my fair desert?

"Cause too thou find'st for doubt, in that it seems
That spirits to the stars, as Plato¹ deem'd,
Return. These are the questions which thy will
Urge equally; and therefore I, the first,
Of that² will treat which hath the more of gall.³
Of seraphim⁴ he who is most enskied,
Moses and Samuel, and either John,
Chuse which thou wilt, nor even Mary's self,
Have not in any other heaven their seats,
Than have those spirits which so late thou saw'st;
Nor more or fewer years exist; but all
Make the first circle⁵ beauteous, diversly
Partaking of sweet life, as more or less
Afflation of eternal bliss pervades them.
Here were they shown thee, not that fate assigns
This for their sphere, but for a sign to thee
Of that celestial furthest from the height.
Thus needs, that ye may apprehend, we speak:
Since from things sensible alone ye learn
That, which, digested rightly, after turns
To intellectual. For no other cause
The Scripture, condescending graciously

¹ *Plato*.—*Ἐννεατος δὲ κ. τ. λ.*, Plato, "Timæus," v. ix., p. 326, edit. Bip. "The Creator, when he had framed the universe, distributed to the stars an equal number of souls, appointing to each soul its several star."

² *Of that*.—Plato's opinion.

³ *Which hath the more of gall*.—Which is the more dangerous.

⁴ *Of seraphim*.—"He amongst the seraphim who is most nearly united with God, Moses, Samuel, and both the Johns, the Baptist and the Evangelist, dwell not in any other heaven than do those spirits whom thou

hast just beheld; nor does even the blessed Virgin herself dwell in any other: nor is their existence either longer or shorter than that of these spirits." She first resolves his doubt whether souls do not return to their own stars, as he had read in the "Timæus" of Plato. Angels, then, and beatified spirits, she declares, dwell all and eternally together, only partaking more or less of the divine glory, in the empyrean; although, in condescension to human understanding, they appear to have different spheres allotted to them.

⁵ *The first circle*.—The empyrean.

To your perception, hands and feet¹ to God
Attributes, nor so means; and holy church
Doth represent with human countenance
Gabriel, and Michael, and him who made
Tobias whole.² Unlike what here thou seest,
The judgment of Timæus,³ who affirms
Each soul restored to its particular star;
Believing it to have been taken thence,
When nature gave it to inform her mold:
Yet to appearance his intention is
Not what his words declare: and so to shun
Derision, haply thus he hath disguised
His true opinion.⁴ If his meaning be,
That to the influencing of these orbs revert
The honour and the blame in human acts,
Perchance he doth not wholly miss the truth.
This principle, not understood aright,
Erewhile perverted well nigh all the world;
So that it fell to fabled names of Jove,
And Mercury, and Mars. That other doubt,
Which moves thee, is less harmful; for it brings
No peril of removing thee from me.

"That, to the eye of man,⁵ our justice seems
Unjust, is argument for faith, and not

¹ *Hands and feet*.—Thus Milton:

"What surmounts the reach
Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
By likening spiritual to corporeal forms,
As shall express them best."

Paradise Lost, b. v. 575.

These passages, rightly considered, may tend to remove the scruples of some who are offended by any attempts at representing the Deity in pictures.

² *Him who made Tobias whole*.

"Raphael, the sociable spirit, that deign'd
To travel with Tobias, and secured
His marriage with the seven times wedded
maid." *Ibid.*, 223.

³ *Timæus*.—In the "Convito," p. 92, our author

again refers to the "Timæus" of Plato, on the subject of the mundane system; but it is in order to give the preference to the opinion respecting it held by Aristotle.

⁴ *His true opinion*.—In like manner, our learned Stillfleet has professed himself "somewhat inclinable to think that Plato knew more of the lapse of mankind than he would openly discover, and for that end disguised it after his usual manner in that hypothesis of pre-existence."—*Origines Sacrae*, b. iii., c. iii., § 15.

⁵ *That, to the eye of man*.—"That the ways of divine justice are often inscrutable to man, ought rather to be a motive to faith than an inducement to heresy." Such appears to me the most satisfactory explanation of the passage.

For heretic declension. But, to the end
This truth¹ may stand more clearly in your view,
I will content thee even to thy wish.

"If violence be, when that which suffers, nought
Consents to that which forceth, not for this
These spirits stood exculpate. For the will,
That wills not, still survives unquench'd, and doth,
As nature doth in fire, though violence
Wrest it a thousand times; for, if it yield
Or more or less, so far it follows force.
And thus did these, when they had power to seek
The hallow'd place again. In them, had will
Been perfect, such as once upon the bars
Held Laurence² firm, or wrought in Scævola³
To his own hand remorseless; to the path,
Whence they were drawn, their steps had hasten'd back,
When liberty return'd: but in too few,
Resolve, so stedfast, dwells. And by these words,
If duly weigh'd, that argument is void,
Which oft might have perplex'd thee still. But now
Another question thwarts thee, which, to solve,
Might try thy patience without better aid.
I have, no doubt, instill'd into thy mind,
That blessed spirit may not lie; since near
The source of primal truth it dwells for aye:
And thou mightst after of Piccarda learn
That Constance held affection to the veil;
So that she seems to contradict me here.
Not seldom, brother, it hath chanced for men
To do what they had gladly left undone;

¹ *This truth*.—That it is no impeachment of God's justice, if merit be lessened through compulsion of others, without any failure of good intention on the part of the meritorious. After all, Beatrice ends by admitting that there was a defect in the will, which hindered Constance and the others from seiz-

ing the first opportunity that offered itself to them of returning to the monastic life.

² *Laurence*.—Who suffered martyrdom in the third century.

³ *Scævola*.—See Livy, "Hist.," Dec. 1, lib. ii. 12.

Yet, to shun peril, they have done amiss;
E'en as Alemæon,¹ at his father's² suit
Slew his own mother;³ so made pitiless,
Not to lose pity. On this point bethink thee,
That force and will are blended in such wise
As not to make the offence excusable.
Absolute will agrees not to the wrong;
But inasmuch as there is fear of woe
From non-compliance, it agrees. Of will⁴
Thus absolute, Piccarda spake, and I
Of the other; so that both have truly said."

Such was the flow of that pure rill, that well'd
From forth the fountain of all truth; and such
The rest, that to my wandering thoughts I found.

"O thou, of primal love the prime delight,
Goddess!" I straight replied, "whose lively words
Still shed new heat and vigour through my soul;
Affection fails me to requite thy grace
With equal sum of gratitude: be his
To recompense, who sees and can reward thee.
Well I discern, that by that truth⁵ alone
Enlighten'd, beyond which no truth may roam,
Our mind can satisfy her thirst to know:
Therein she resteth, e'en as in his lair
The wild beast, soon as she hath reach'd that bound.
And she hath power to reach it; else desire
Were given to no end. And thence doth doubt
Spring, like a shoot, around the stock of truth;
And it is nature which, from height to height,
On to the summit prompts us. This invites,

¹ *Alemæon*.—Ovid, "Metamorphoses," lib. ix. f. 10:

"Ultusque parente parentem
Natus, erit facto pius et sceleratus eodem."

² *His father's*.—Amphiaræus.

³ *His own mother*.—Eriphyle.

⁴ *Of will*.—"What Piccarda asserts of Constance,

that she retained her affection to the monastic life, is said absolutely and without relation to circumstances; and that which I affirm is spoken of the will conditionally and respectively: so that our apparent difference is without any disagreement."

⁵ *Well I discern, that by that truth*.—The light of divine truth.

This doth assure me, Lady! reverently
 To ask thee of another truth, that yet
 Is dark to me. I fain would know, if man
 By other works well done may so supply
 The failure of his vows, that in your scale
 They lack not weight." I spake; and on me straight
 Beatrice look'd, with eyes that shot forth sparks
 Of love celestial, in such copious stream,
 That, virtue sinking in me overpower'd,
 I turn'd; and downward bent, confused, my sight.

CANTO V.

ARGUMENT.

The question proposed in the last canto is answered. Dante ascends with Beatrice to the planet Mercury, which is the second heaven; and here he finds a multitude of spirits, one of whom offers to satisfy him of anything he may desire to know from them.

"IF beyond earthly wont,¹ the flame of love
 Illume me, so that I o'ercome thy power
 Of vision, marvel not: but learn the cause
 In that perfection of the sight, which, soon
 As apprehending, hasteneth on to reach
 The good it apprehends. I well discern,
 How in thine intellect already shines
 The light eternal, which to view alone
 Ne'er fails to kindle love; and if aught else
 Your love seduces, 'tis but that it shows
 Some ill-mark'd vestige of that primal beam.

"This wouldst thou know: if failure of the vow
 By other service may be so supplied,
 As from self-question to assure the soul."

Thus she her words, not heedless of my wish,
 Began; and thus, as one who breaks not off
 Discourse, continued in her saintly strain.

"Supreme of gifts,² which God, creating, gave

¹ *If beyond earthly wont.*—Dante having been unable to sustain the splendour of Beatrice, as we have seen at the end of the last canto, she tells him to attribute her increase of brightness to the place in which they were.

² *Supreme of gifts.*—So in the "De Monarchia," lib. i., pp. 107 and 108, "Si ergo judicium moveat," &c.: "If, then, the judgment altogether move the appetite, and is in no wise prevented by it, it is free. But if the judgment be moved by the appetite in any

way preventing it, it cannot be free: because it acts not of itself, but is led captive by another. And hence it is that brutes cannot have free judgment, because their judgments are always prevented by appetite. And hence it may also appear manifest, that intellectual substances, whose wills are immutable, and likewise souls separated from the body, and departing from it well and holily, lose not the liberty of choice on account of the immutability of the will, but retain it most perfectly and powerfully.