

CANTO XI.

ARGUMENT.

Thomas Aquinas enters at large into the life and character of St. Francis; and then solves one of two difficulties, which he perceived to have risen in Dante's mind from what he had heard in the last canto.

O FOND anxiety of mortal men!¹
 How vain and inconclusive arguments
 Are those, which make thee beat thy wings below.
 For statutes one, and one for aphorisms²
 Was hunting; this the priesthood follow'd; that,
 By force or sophistry, aspired to rule;
 To rob, another; and another sought,
 By civil business, wealth; one, moiling, lay
 Tangled in net of sensual delight;
 And one to wistless indolence resign'd;
 What time from all these empty things escaped,
 With Beatrice, I thus gloriously
 Was raised aloft, and made the guest of heaven.
 They of the circle to that point, each one,
 Where erst it was, had turn'd; and steady glow'd,
 As candle in his socket. Then within
 The lustre,³ that erewhile bespake me, smiling
 With merer gladness, heard I thus begin:
 "E'en as his beam illumines me, so I look
 Into the eternal light, and clearly mark
 Thy thoughts from whence they rise. Thou art in doubt,
 And wouldst that I should bolt my words afresh

¹ *O fond anxiety of mortal men.*—Lucretius, lib. ii. 14:

"O miseras hominum mentes! O pectora cæca!"
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Qualibus in tenebris vitæ, quantisque periculis
 Degitur hoc ævi quodeunque est!"
² *Aphorisms.*—The study of medicine.
³ *The lustre.*—The spirit of Thomas Aquinas.

In such plain open phrase, as may be smooth
 To thy perception, where I told thee late
 That 'well they thrive;' ¹ and that 'no second such' ²
 Hath risen,' which no small distinction needs.

"The Providence, that governeth the world,
 In depth of counsel by created ken
 Unfathomable, to the end that she,³
 Who with loud cries was 'spoused in precious blood,
 Might keep her footing towards her well-beloved,⁴
 Safe in herself and constant unto him,
 Hath two ordain'd, who should on either hand
 In chief escort her: one,⁵ seraphic all
 In fervency; for wisdom upon earth,
 The other,⁶ splendour of cherubic light.
 I but of one will tell: he tells of both,
 Who one commendeth, which of them soe'er
 Be taken: for their deeds were to one end.

"Between Tupino,⁷ and the wave that falls
 From blest Ubaldo's chosen hill, there hangs
 Rich slope of mountain high, whence heat and cold⁸
 Are wafted through Perugia's eastern gate:
 And Nocera with Gualdo, in its rear,
 Mourn for their heavy yoke.⁹ Upon that side,
 Where it doth break its steepness most, arose
 A sun upon the world, as duly this
 From Ganges doth: therefore let none, who speak
 Of that place, say Ascesi; for its name

¹ *That 'well they thrive.'*—See the last canto, v. 93.

² *'No second such.'*—See the last canto, v. 111.

³ *She.*—The church.

⁴ *Her well-beloved.*—Jesus Christ.

⁵ *One.*—St. Francis.

⁶ *The other.*—St. Dominic.

⁷ *Tupino.*—Thomas Aquinas proceeds to describe the birth-place of St. Francis, between Tupino, a rivulet near Assisi, or Ascesi, where the saint was

born in 1182, and Chiascio, a stream that rises in a mountain near Agobbio, chosen by St. Ubaldo for the place of his retirement.

⁸ *Heat and cold.*—Cold from the snow, and heat from the reflection of the sun.

⁹ *Yoke.*—Vellutello understands this of the vicinity of the mountain to Nocera and Gualdo; and Venturi (as I have taken it) of the heavy impositions laid on those places by the Perugians; for *giogo*, like the Latin *jugum*, will admit of either sense.

Were lamely so deliver'd: but the East,¹
 To call things rightly, be it henceforth styled.
 He was not yet much distant from his rising,
 When his good influence 'gan to bless the earth.
 A dame,² to whom none openeth pleasure's gate
 More than to death, was, 'gainst his father's will,³
 His stripling choice: and he did make her his,
 Before the spiritual court,⁴ by nuptial bonds,
 And in his father's sight: from day to day,
 Then loved her more devoutly. She, bereaved
 Of her first husband,⁵ slighted and obscure,
 Thousand and hundred years and more, remain'd
 Without a single suitor, till he came.
 Nor aught avail'd, that, with Amyclas,⁶ she
 Was found unmoved at rumour of his voice,
 Who shook the world: nor aught her constant boldness
 Whereby with Christ she mounted on the cross,
 When Mary stay'd beneath. But not to deal
 Thus closely with thee longer, take at large
 The lovers' titles—Poverty and Francis.
 Their concord and glad looks, wonder and love,
 And sweet regard gave birth to holy thoughts,
 So much, that venerable Bernard⁷ first
 Did bare his feet, and, in pursuit of peace
 So heavenly, ran, yet deem'd his footing slow.

¹ *The East*.—"This is the east, and Juliet is the sun."—*Shakespeare*.

² *A dame*.—There is in the under church of St. Francis, at Assisi, a picture painted by Giotto from this subject. It is considered one of the artist's best works. See Kugler's "Hand-book of the History of Painting," translated by a lady, London, 1842, p. 48.

³ *'Gainst his father's will*.—In opposition to the wishes of his natural father.

⁴ *Before the spiritual court*.—He made a vow of poverty in the presence of the bishop and of his natural father.

⁵ *Her first husband*.—Christ.

⁶ *Amyclas*.—Lucan makes Caesar exclaim, on witnessing the secure poverty of the fisherman Amyclas:

"O vite tuta facultas

Pauperis, angustique lares! O munera nondum
 Intellecta deum! quibus hoc contingere templis,
 Aut potuit muris, nullo trepidare tumultu,
 Cæsareâ pulsante manu?"—*Pharsalia*, lib. v. 531.

"O happy poverty! thou greatest good
 Bestow'd by heaven, but seldom understood!
 Here nor the cruel spoiler seeks his prey,
 Nor ruthless armies take their dreadful way."
 Rowe.

A translation in prose of these lines is introduced by our poet in his "Convito," p. 170.

⁷ *Bernard*.—Of Quintavalle, one of the first followers of the saint.

O hidden riches! O prolific good!
 Egidius¹ bares him next, and next Sylvester,²
 And follow, both, the bridegroom: so the bride
 Can please them. Thenceforth goes he on his way
 The father and the master, with his spouse,
 And with that family, whom now the cord³
 Girt humbly: nor did abjectness of heart
 Weigh down his eyelids, for that he was son
 Of Pietro Bernardone,⁴ and by men
 In wondrous sort despised. But royally
 His hard intention he to Innocent⁵
 Set forth: and, from him, first received the seal
 On his religion. Then, when numerous flock'd
 The tribe of lowly ones, that traced *his* steps,
 Whose marvellous life deservedly were sung
 In heights empyreal; through Honorius'⁶ hand
 A second crown, to deck their Guardian's virtues,
 Was by the eternal Spirit inwreathed: and when
 He had, through thirst of martyrdom, stood up
 In the proud Soldan's presence,⁷ and there preach'd
 Christ and his followers, but found the race
 Unripen'd for conversion; back once more
 He hasted (not to intermit his toil),
 And reap'd Ausonian lands. On the hard rock,⁸
 'Twixt Arno and the Tiber, he from Christ
 Took the last signet,⁹ which his limbs two years
 Did carry. Then, the season come that he,

Egidius.—The third of his disciples, who died in 1262. His work, entitled "Verba Aurea," was published in 1534, at Antwerp. See Lucas Waddingus, "Annales Ordinis Minoris," p. 5.

² *Sylvester*.—Another of his earliest associates.

³ *Whom now the cord*.—St. Francis bound his body with a cord, in sign that he considered it as a beast, and that it required, like a beast, to be led by a halter.

⁴ *Pietro Bernardone*.—A man in an humble station of life at Assisi.

⁵ *Innocent*.—Pope Innocent III.

⁶ *Honorius*.—His successor Honorius III., who granted certain privileges to the Franciscans.

⁷ *In the proud Soldan's presence*.—The Soldan of Egypt, before whom St. Francis is said to have preached.

⁸ *On the hard rock*.—The mountain Alverna in the Apennine.

⁹ *The last signet*.—Alluding to the stigmata, or marks resembling the wounds of Christ, said to have been found on the saint's body.

Who to such good had destined him, was pleased
To advance him to the meed, which he had earn'd
By his self-humbl'ing; to his brotherhood,
As their just heritage, he gave in charge
His dearest lady:¹ and enjoin'd their love
And faith to her; and, from her bosom, will'd
His goodly spirit should move forth, returning
To its appointed kingdom; nor would have
His body² laid upon another bier.

"Think now of one, who were a fit colleague
To keep the bark of Peter, in deep sea,
Helm'd to right point; and such our Patriarch³ was.
Therefore who follow him as he enjoins,
Thou mayst be certain, take good lading in.
But hunger of new viands tempts his flock;⁴
So that they needs into strange pastures wide
Must spread them: and the more remote from him
The stragglers wander, so much more they come
Home, to the sheep-fold, destitute of milk.
There are of them, in truth, who fear their harm,
And to the shepherd cleave; but these so few,
A little stuff may furnish out their cloaks.

"Now, if my words be clear; if thou have ta'en
Good heed; if that, which I have told, recall
To mind; thy wish may be in part fulfill'd:
For thou wilt see the plant from whence they split;⁵
And he shall see, who girds him, what that means,⁶
'That well they thrive, not swoln with vanity.'"

¹ *His dearest lady.*—Poverty.

² *His body.*—He forbade any funeral pomp to be observed at his burial; and, as it is said, ordered that his remains should be deposited in a place where criminals were executed and interred.

³ *Our Patriarch.*—St. Dominic, to whose order Thomas Aquinas belonged.

⁴ *His flock.*—The Dominicans.

⁵ *The plant from whence they split.*—"The rule of their order, which the Dominicans neglect to observe."

⁶ *And he shall see, who girds him, what that means.*—Lombardi, after the Nidobeatina edition, together with four MSS., reads "il correggiar," or "il coregier," which gives the sense that now stands in the text of this version. The Dominicans might be called "coreggieri," from their wearing a leathern girdle, as the Franciscans were called "cordiglieri," from their being girt with a cord. I had before followed the common reading, "il corregger;" and translated the line according to Venturi's interpretation of it: "Nor miss of the reproof which that implies."

CANTO XII.

ARGUMENT.

A second circle of glorified souls encompasses the first. Buonaventura, who is one of them, celebrates the praises of Saint Dominic, and informs Dante who the other eleven are that are in this second circle or garland.

SOON as its final word the blessed flame¹
Had raised for utterance, straight the holy mill²
Began to wheel; nor yet had once revolved,
Or e'er another, circling, compass'd it,
Motion to motion, song to song, conjoining;
Song, that as much our muses doth excel,
Our Syrens with their tuneful pipes, as ray
Of primal splendour doth its faint reflex.

As when, if Juno bid her handmaid forth,
Two arches parallel, and trick'd alike,
Span the thin cloud, the outer taking birth
From that within (in manner of that voice³
Whom love did melt away, as sun the mist)
And they who gaze, presageful call to mind
The compact, made with Noah, of the world
No more to be o'erflow'd; about us thus,
Of sempiternal roses, bending, wreathed
Those garlands twain; and to the innermost
E'en thus the external answer'd. When the footing,

¹ *The blessed flame.*—Thomas Aquinas.

² *The holy mill.*—The circle of spirits.

³ *In manner of that voice.*—One rainbow giving back the image of the other, as sound is reflected by Echo, that nymph, who was melted away by her fondness for Narcissus, as vapour is melted by the sun. The reader will observe in the text not only

a second and third simile within the first, but two mythological and one sacred allusion bound up together with the whole. Even after this accumulation of imagery, the two circles of spirits, by whom Beatrice and Dante were encompassed, are by a bold figure termed two garlands of never-fading roses. Indeed, there is a fulness of splendour, even to prodigality, throughout the beginning of this canto.