

Engendereth loving; for that lively light,<sup>1</sup>  
Which passeth from his splendour, not disjoin'd  
From him, nor from his love triune with them,<sup>2</sup>  
Doth, through his bounty, congregate itself,  
Mirror'd, as 'twere, in new existences;<sup>3</sup>  
Itself unalterable, and ever one.

"Descending hence unto the lowest powers,<sup>4</sup>  
Its energy so sinks, at last it makes  
But brief contingencies; for so I name  
Things generated, which the heavenly orbs  
Moving, with seed or without seed, produce.  
Their wax, and that which molds it,<sup>5</sup> differ much:  
And thence with lustre, more or less, it shows  
The ideal stamp imprest: so that one tree,  
According to his kind, hath better fruit,  
And worse: and, at your birth, ye, mortal men,  
Are in your talents various. Were the wax  
Molded with nice exactness, and the heaven<sup>6</sup>  
In its disposing influence supreme,  
The brightness of the seal<sup>7</sup> should be complete:  
But nature renders it imperfect ever;  
Resembling thus the artist, in her work,  
Whose faltering hand is faithless to his skill.  
Therefore,<sup>8</sup> if fervent love dispose, and mark  
The lustrous image of the primal virtue,  
There all perfection is vouchsafed; and such

<sup>1</sup> *Light*.—The Word: the Son of God.

<sup>2</sup> *His love triune with them*.—The Holy Ghost.

<sup>3</sup> *New existences*.—Angels and human souls. If we read with some editions and many MSS. "nove" instead of "nuove," it should be rendered "nine existences," and then means "the nine heavens;" and this reading is approved by Lombardi, Biagioli, and Monti. In the terms "sussistenza" and "contingenza," "existences and contingencies," Dante follows the language of the scholastic writers, which I have endeavoured to preserve.

<sup>4</sup> *The lowest powers*.—Irrational life and brute matter.

<sup>5</sup> *Their wax, and that which molds it*.—Matter, and the virtue or energy that acts on it.

<sup>6</sup> *The heaven*.—The influence of the planetary bodies.

<sup>7</sup> *The brightness of the seal*.—The brightness of the Divine idea before spoken of.

<sup>8</sup> *Therefore*.—Daniello, says Lombardi, has shown his sagacity in remarking that our poet intends this for a brief description of the Trinity: the primal virtue signifying the Father; the lustrous image, the Son; the fervent love, the Holy Ghost.

The clay<sup>1</sup> was made, accomplish'd with each gift,  
That life can teem with; such the burden fill'd  
The virgin's bosom: so that I commend  
Thy judgment, that the human nature ne'er  
Was, or can be, such as in them it was.

"Did I advance no further than this point;  
'How then had he no peer?' thou might'st reply.  
But, that what now appears not, may appear  
Right plainly, ponder, who he was, and what  
(When he was bidden 'Ask') the motive, sway'd  
To his requesting. I have spoken thus,  
That thou mayst see, he was a king, who ask'd<sup>2</sup>  
For wisdom, to the end he might be king  
Sufficient: not, the number<sup>3</sup> to search out  
Of the celestial movers; or to know,  
If necessary<sup>4</sup> with contingent e'er  
Have made necessity; or whether that  
Be granted, that first motion<sup>5</sup> is; or if,  
Of the mid circle,<sup>6</sup> can by art be made  
Triangle, with its corner blunt or sharp.

"Whence, noting that, which I have said, and this,  
Thou kingly prudence and that ken<sup>7</sup> mayst learn,  
At which the dart of my intention aims.  
And, marking clearly, that I told thee, 'Risen,'  
Thou shalt discern it only hath respect  
To kings, of whom are many, and the good

<sup>1</sup> *The clay*.—Adam.

<sup>2</sup> *Who ask'd*.—"He did not desire to know the number of the celestial intelligences, or to pry into the subtleties of logical, metaphysical, or mathematical science: but asked for that wisdom which might fit him for his kingly office."

<sup>3</sup> *The number*.—This question is discussed by our poet himself in the "Convito," p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> *If necessary*.—"If a premise necessarily true, with one not necessarily true, ever produced a necessary consequence: a question resolved in the negative by the art of logic, with that general rule, conclusio sequitur debiliorem partem."—Lombardi.

<sup>5</sup> *That first motion*.—"If we must allow one first motion, which is not caused by other motion: a question resolved affirmatively by metaphysics, according to that principle, repugnat in causis processus in infinitum."—Lombardi.

<sup>6</sup> *Of the mid circle*.—"If in the half of the circle a rectilinear triangle can be described, one side of which shall be the diameter of the same circle, without its forming a right angle with the other two sides; which geometry shows to be impossible."—Lombardi.

<sup>7</sup> *That ken*.—See canto x. 110.



Are rare. With this distinction take my words  
 And they may well consist with that which thou  
 Of the first human father dost believe,  
 And of our well-beloved. And let this  
 Henceforth be lead unto thy feet, to make  
 Thee slow in motion, as a weary man,  
 Both to the 'yea' and to the 'nay' thou seest not.  
 For he among the fools is down full low,  
 Whose affirmation, or denial,<sup>1</sup> is  
 Without distinction, in each case alike.  
 Since it befalls, that in most instances  
 Current opinion leans to false: and then  
 Affection bends the judgment to her ply.

"Much more than vainly doth he loose from shore,  
 Since he returns not such as he set forth,  
 Who fishes for the truth and wanteth skill.  
 And open proofs of this unto the world  
 Have been afforded in Parmenides,  
 Melissus, Bryso,<sup>2</sup> and the crowd beside,  
 Who journey'd on, and knew not whither: so did  
 Sabellius, Arius,<sup>3</sup> and the other fools,  
 Who, like to scymitars,<sup>4</sup> reflected back  
 The scripture-image by distortion marr'd.

"Let not the people be too swift to judge;  
 As one who reckons on the blades in field,  
 Or e'er the crop be ripe. For I have seen

<sup>1</sup> Whose affirmation, or denial.—Τὼν γὰρ ἄρτι δεινότερα ἂν τις ὁμολογήσειε, μὴ προσχὼν τοῖς ῥήμασι τὸν νοῦν, ἢ τοπολὶ εἰθισμένα φάναί τε καὶ ἀπαρνεῖσθαι. *Plato, Theætetus*, ed. Bip., v. ii., p. 97. "For any one might make yet absurder concessions than these, not paying strict attention to terms, according to the way in which we are for the most part accustomed both to affirm and to deny."

<sup>2</sup> *Parmenides, Melissus, Bryso*.—For the singular opinions entertained by the two former of these heathen philosophers, see Diogenes Laertius, lib. ix., and Aristotle, "De Cælo," lib. iii., cap. i., and "Phys.," lib. i., cap. ii. The last is also twice ad-

duced by Aristotle ("Anal. Post.," lib. i., cap. ix., and "Rhet.," lib. iii., cap. ii.) as affording instances of false reasoning. Our poet refers to the philosopher's refutation of them in the "De Monarchiâ," lib. iii., p. 138. See also Plato in the "Theætetus," the "Sophist," and the "Parmenides."

<sup>3</sup> *Sabellius, Arius*.—Well-known heretics.

<sup>4</sup> *Scymitars*.—A passage in the travels of Bertrandon de la Brocquière, translated by Mr. Johnes, will explain this allusion, which has given some trouble to the commentators. That traveller, who wrote before Dante, informs us, p. 138, that the wandering Arabs used their scymitars as mirrors.





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And I beheld myself,  
Sole with my lady, to more lofty bliss  
Translated.

*Canto XIV, lines 77-79.*

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PARADISE.—CANTO XIII.

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The thorn frown rudely all the winter long,  
And after bear the rose upon its top;  
And bark, that all her way across the sea  
Ran straight and speedy, perish at the last  
E'en in the haven's mouth. Seeing one steal,  
Another bring his offering to the priest,  
Let not<sup>1</sup> Dame BIRTHA and Sir MARTIN<sup>2</sup> thence  
Into heaven's counsels deem that they can pry:  
For one of these may rise, the other fall."

<sup>1</sup> *Let not.*—"Let not short-sighted mortals presume to decide on the future doom of any man, from a consideration of his present character and actions." This is meant as an answer to the doubts entertained respecting the salvation of Solomon. See c. x. 107.

<sup>2</sup> *Dame BIRTHA and Sir MARTIN.*—Names put generally for any persons who have more curiosity than discretion.