

And mantling crimson, in two listed rays  
The splendours shot before me, that I cried,  
“God of Sabaoth! that dost prank them thus!”

As leads the galaxy from pole to pole,  
Distinguish'd into greater lights and less,  
Its pathway,<sup>1</sup> which the wisest fail to spell;  
So thickly studded, in the depth of Mars,  
Those rays described the venerable sign,<sup>2</sup>  
That quadrants in the round conjoining frame.

Here memory mocks the toil of genius. Christ  
Beam'd on that cross; and pattern fails me now.  
But whoso takes his cross, and follows Christ,  
Will pardon me for that I leave untold,  
When in the flecker'd dawning he shall spy  
The glitterance of Christ. From horn to horn,  
And 'tween the summit and the base, did move  
Lights, scintillating, as they met and pass'd.  
Thus oft are seen with ever-changeeful glance,  
Straight or athwart, now rapid and now slow,  
The atomies of bodies,<sup>3</sup> long or short,  
To move along the sunbeam, whose slant line

<sup>1</sup> *Its pathway.*—See the “Convito,” p. 74, “E da sapere,” &c. “It must be known, that, concerning the galaxy, philosophers have entertained different opinions. The Pythagoreans say that the sun once wandered out of his way, and passing through other parts not suited to his heat, scorched the place through which he passed; and that there was left that appearance of the scorching. I think they grounded their opinion on the fable of Phaëton, which Ovid relates at the beginning of his ‘Metamorphoses.’ Others (as Anaxagoras and Democritus) said that it proceeded from a partial repercussion of the solar light, which they proved by such reasons as they could bring to demonstrate it. What Aristotle has said cannot well be known, because his meaning is not made the same in one translation as in another; and I think it must have been an error in the translators; for, in the new, he seems to say that it is a collection of vapours under the stars, which they always attract in that part; and this appears devoid of any true reason. In the old, he

says that the galaxy is nothing else than a multitude of fixed stars in that part, so small, that here below we cannot distinguish them, but that they form the appearance of that whiteness which we call the galaxy. And it may be that the heaven in that part is dense, and therefore retains and represents that light; and in this opinion Avicen and Ptolemy seem to agree with Aristotle.” M. Letronne’s remarks on this passage of the “Convito,” inserted in M. Artaud’s “Histoire de Dante” (8vo, Par., 1841, p. 157), are worth consulting.

<sup>2</sup> *The venerable sign.*—The cross, which is placed in the planet of Mars, to denote the glory of those who fought in the crusades.

<sup>3</sup> *The atomies of bodies.*—

“As thick as motes in the sun-beame.”

*Chaucer, edit. 1603, fol. 35.*

“As thick and numberless,  
As the gay motes that people the sunbeam.”

*Milton, Il Penseroso.*



Checkers the shadow interposed by art  
 Against the noontide heat. And as the chime  
 Of minstrel music, dulcimer, and harp  
 With many strings, a pleasant dinning makes  
 To him, who heareth not the distinct note;  
 So from the lights, which there appear'd to me,  
 Gather'd along the cross a melody,  
 That, indistinctly heard, with ravishment  
 Possess'd me. Yet I mark'd it was a hymn  
 Of lofty praises; for there came to me  
 "Arise," and "Conquer," as to one who hears  
 And comprehends not. Me such ecstasy  
 O'ercame, that never, till that hour, was thing  
 That held me in so sweet imprisonment.

Perhaps my saying overbold appears,  
 Accounting less the pleasure of those eyes,  
 Whereon to look fulfilleth all desire.  
 But he,<sup>1</sup> who is aware those living seals  
 Of every beauty work with quicker force,  
 The higher they are risen; and that there  
 I had not turn'd me to them; he may well  
 Excuse me that, whereof in my excuse  
 I do accuse me, and may own my truth;  
 That holy pleasure here not yet reveal'd,<sup>2</sup>  
 Which grows in transport as we mount aloof.

<sup>1</sup> *He*.—"He who considers that the eyes of Beatrice became more radiant the higher we ascended, must not wonder that I do not except even them, as I had not yet beheld them since our entrance into this planet." Lombardi understands by "living seals," "vivi suggelli," "the stars;" and this explanation derives some authority from the Latin notes on the Monte Casino MS., "id est cœli imprimentes ut sigilla."

<sup>2</sup> *Reveal'd*.—"Dischiuso." Lombardi explains this word "excluded," as indeed Vellutello had done before him; and as it is also used in the seventh canto. If this interpretation were adopted, the line should stand thus:

"That holy pleasure not excluded here."  
 But the word is capable of either meaning; and it would not be easy to determine which is the right in this passage.

## CANTO XV.

## ARGUMENT.

The spirit of Cacciagnida, our Poet's ancestor, glides rapidly to the foot of the cross, tells who he is, and speaks of the simplicity of the Florentines in his days, since then much corrupted.

TRUE love, that ever shows itself as clear  
 In kindness, as loose appetite in wrong,  
 Silenced that lyre harmonious, and still'd  
 The sacred chords, that are by heaven's right hand  
 Unwound and tighten'd. How to righteous prayers  
 Should they not hearken, who, to give me will  
 For praying, in accordance thus were mute?  
 He hath in sooth good cause for endless grief,  
 Who, for the love of thing that lasteth not,  
 Despoils himself forever of that love.

As oft along the still and pure serene,  
 At nightfall, glides a sudden trail of fire,  
 Attracting with involuntary heed  
 The eye to follow it, erewhile at rest;  
 And seems some star<sup>1</sup> that shifted place in heaven,  
 Only that, whence it kindles, none is lost,  
 And it is soon extinct: thus from the horn,  
 That on the dexter of the cross extends,  
 Down to its foot, one luminary ran  
 From mid the cluster shone there; yet no gem  
 Dropp'd from its foil: and through the beamy list,  
 Like flame in alabaster, glow'd its course.

<sup>1</sup> *Some star*.—"Pare una stella che tramuti loco."  
*Frezzi, Il Quadriregio*, lib. i., cap. 13.

"Sæpe etiam stellas, vento impendente, videbis,

Præcipites cœlo labi, noctisque per umbram  
 Flammarum longos a tergo albescere tractus."  
*Virgil, Georgics*, lib. i. 367.

Compare Arat., *Διοσημ.*, 194.