



For that all those living lights,
Waxing in splendour, burst forth into songs,
Such as from memory glide and fall away.
Canto XX. lines 10-12.

CANTO XX.

ARGUMENT.

The eagle celebrates the praise of certain kings, whose glorified spirits form the eye of the bird. In the pupil is David, and in the circle round it, Trajan, Hezekiah, Constantine, William II. of Sicily, and Ripheus. It explains to our Poet how the souls of those whom he supposed to have had no means of believing in Christ, came to be in heaven; and concludes with an admonition against presuming to fathom the counsels of God.

WHEN, disappearing from our hemisphere,
The world's enlightener vanishes, and day
On all sides wasteth; suddenly the sky,
Erewhile irradiate only with his beam,
Is yet again unfolded, putting forth
Innumerable lights wherein one shines.¹
Of such vicissitude in heaven I thought;
As the great sign,² that marshalleth the world
And the world's leaders, in the blessed beak
Was silent: for that all those living lights,
Waxing in splendour, burst forth into songs,
Such as from memory glide and fall away.

Sweet Love, that dost apparel thee in smiles!
How lustrous was thy semblance in those sparkles,
Which merely are from holy thoughts inspired.

After³ the precious and bright beaming stones,
That did ingem the sixth light, ceased the chiming
Of their angelic bells; methought I heard
The murmuring of a river, that doth fall

¹ *Wherein one shines.*—The light of the sun, whence he supposes the other celestial bodies to derive their light. Thus, in the "Convito," p. 115, "Nullo sensibile," &c. "No sensible object in the world is more worthy to be made an example of the deity than the sun, which with sensible light en-

lightens first itself, and then all celestial and elementary bodies."

² *The great sign.*—The eagle, the Imperial ensign.

³ *After.*—"After the spirits in the sixth planet (Jupiter) had ceased their singing."