

CANTO XXII.

ARGUMENT.

He beholds many other spirits of the devout and contemplative; and amongst these is addressed by St. Benedict, who, after disclosing his own name and the names of certain of his companions in bliss, replies to the request made by our Poet that he might look on the form of the saint without that covering of splendour which then invested it; and then proceeds, lastly, to inveigh against the corruption of the monks. Next Dante mounts with his heavenly conductress to the eighth heaven, or that of the fixed stars, which he enters at the constellation of the Twins; and thence looking back, reviews all the space he has passed between his present station and the earth.

ASTOUNDED, to the guardian of my steps
 I turn'd me, like the child, who always runs
 Thither for succour, where he trusteth most:
 And she was like the mother,¹ who her son
 Beholding pale and breathless, with her voice
 Soothes him, and he is cheer'd; for thus she spake,
 Soothing me: "Know'st not thou, thou art in heaven?
 And know'st not thou, whatever is in heaven,
 Is holy; and that nothing there is done,
 But is done zealously and well? Deem now,
 What change in thee the song, and what my smile
 Had wrought, since thus the shout had power to move thee;
 In which, couldst thou have understood their prayers,
 The vengeance² were already known to thee,
 Which thou must witness ere thy mortal hour.
 The sword of heaven is not in haste to smite,
 Nor yet doth linger; save unto his seeming,
 Who, in desire or fear, doth look for it.

¹ And she was like the mother.—

"Come la madre, che 'l figliuol ascolta
 Dietro a se piangner, si volge, ed aspetta,
 Poi il prende per mano e da la volta."

Fazio degli Uberti, *Dittamondo*, lib. iii., cap. 21.

² The vengeance were already known to thee.—
 Beatrice, it is supposed, intimates the approaching
 fate of Boniface VIII.

See "Purgatory," canto xx. 86.

But elsewhere now I bid thee turn thy view;
 So shalt thou many a famous spirit behold."

Mine eyes directing, as she will'd, I saw
 A hundred little spheres, that fairer grew
 By interchange of splendour. I remain'd,
 As one, who fearful of o'er-much presuming,
 Abates in him the keenness of desire,
 Nor dares to question; when, amid those pearls,
 One largest and most lustrous onward drew,
 That it might yield contentment to my wish;
 And, from within it, these the sounds I heard.

"If thou, like me, beheld'st the charity
 That burns amongst us; what thy mind conceives,
 Were utter'd. But that, ere the lofty bound
 Thou reach, expectance may not weary thee;
 I will make answer even to the thought,
 Which thou hast such respect of. In old days,
 That mountain, at whose side Cassino¹ rests,
 Was, on its height, frequented by a race²
 Deceived and ill-disposed: and I it was,³
 Who thither carried first the name of Him,
 Who brought the soul-subliming truth to man.
 And such a speeding grace shone over me,
 That from their impious worship I reclaim'd

¹ Cassino.—A castle in the Terra di Lavoro. "The learned Benedictine, D. Angelo della Noce, in his notes on the chronicle of the monastery of Cassino (Not. exi.), corrects the error of Cluverius and Eftenus, who describe Cassino as situated in the same place where the monastery now is; at the same time commending the veracity of our author in this passage, which places Cassino on the side of the mountain, and points out the monastery founded by St. Benedict on its summit."—*Lombardi*.

² Frequented by a race.—*Lombardi* here cites an apposite passage from the writings of Pope St. Gregory, "Mons tria millia," &c.—*Dialog.*, lib. ii., cap. 8: "The mountain, rising for the space of three miles, stretches its top towards the sky, where was a very ancient temple, in which, after the manner of the old heathens, Apollo was worshipped by

the foolish rustics. On every side, groves had sprung up in honour of the false gods; and in these the mad multitude of unbelievers still tended on their unhallowed sacrifices. There then the man of God (St. Benedict) arriving, beat in pieces the idols, overturned the altar, cut down the groves, and in the very temple of Apollo built the shrine of St. Martin, placing that of St. John where the altar of Apollo had stood; and, by his continual preaching, called the multitude that dwelt round about to the true faith."

³ I it was.—"A new order of monks, which in a manner absorbed all the others that were established in the west, was instituted A.D. 529, by Benedict of Nursia, a man of piety and reputation for the age he lived in."—*Maclaine's Mosheim, Eccles. Hist.*, vol. ii., cent. vi., p. ii., c. ii., § 6.

The dwellers round about, who with the world
Were in delusion lost. These other flames,
The spirits of men contemplative, were all
Enliven'd by that warmth, whose kindly force
Gives birth to flowers and fruits of holiness.
Here is Macarius;¹ Romoaldo² here;
And here my brethren, who their steps refrain'd
Within the cloisters, and held firm their heart."

I answering thus: "Thy gentle words and kind,
And this the cheerful semblance I behold,
Not unobservant, beaming in ye all,
Have raised assurance in me; wakening it
Full-blossom'd in my bosom, as a rose
Before the sun, when the consummate flower
Has spread to utmost amplitude. Of thee
Therefore intreat I, father, to declare
If I may gain such favour, as to gaze
Upon thine image by no covering veil'd."

"Brother!" he thus rejoind, "in the last sphere"
Expect completion of thy lofty aim:
For there on each desire completion waits,
And there on mine; where every aim is found
Perfect, entire, and for fulfilment ripe.
There all things are as they have ever been:
For space is none to bound; nor pole divides.
Our ladder reaches even to that clime;
And so, at giddy distance, mocks thy view.
Thither the patriarch Jacob⁴ saw it stretch

¹ *Macarius*.—There are two of this name enumerated by Mosheim among the Greek theologians of the fourth century, vol. i., cent. iv., p. xi., chap. ii., § 9. In the following chapter, § 10, it is said, "Macarius, an Egyptian monk, undoubtedly deserves the first rank among the practical writers of this time, as his works displayed, some few things excepted, the brightest and most lovely portraiture of sanctity and virtue."

² *Romoaldo*.—S. Romoaldo, a native of Ravenna,

and the founder of the order of Camaldoli, died in 1027. He was the author of a commentary on the Psalms.

³ *In the last sphere*.—The Empyrean, where he afterwards sees St. Benedict, canto xxxii. 30. Beatified spirits, though they have different heavens allotted them, have all their seat in that higher sphere.

⁴ *The patriarch Jacob*.—"And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of

Its topmost round; when it appear'd to him
With angels laden. But to mount it now
None lifts his foot from earth: and hence my rule
Is left a profitless stain upon the leaves;
The walls, for abbey rear'd, turned into dens;
The cows, to sacks choak'd up with musty meal.
Foul usury doth not more lift itself
Against God's pleasure, than that fruit, which makes
The hearts of monks so wanton: for whate'er
Is in the church's keeping, all pertains
To such, as sue for heaven's sweet sake; and not
To those, who in respect of kindred claim,
Or on more vile allowance. Mortal flesh
Is grown so dainty, good beginnings last not
From the oak's birth unto the acorn's setting.
His convent Peter founded without gold
Or silver; I, with prayers and fasting, mine;
And Francis, his in meek humility.
And if thou note the point, whence each proceeds,
Then look what it hath err'd to; thou shalt find
The white grown murky. Jordan was turn'd back:
And a less wonder, than the reflux sea,
May, at God's pleasure, work amendment here."

So saying, to his assembly back he drew:
And they together cluster'd into one;
Then all rolled upward, like an eddying wind.

The sweet dame beckon'd me to follow them:
And, by that influence only, so prevail'd
Over my nature, that no natural motion,
Ascending or descending here below,
Had, as I mounted, with my pennon vied.

So, reader, as my hope is to return

it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it."—Gen. xviii. 12. So Milton, "Paradise Lost," b. iii. 510:

"The stairs were such, as whereon Jacob saw
Angels ascending and descending, bands
Of guardians bright."

Unto the holy triumph, for the which
 I oft-times wail my sins, and smite my breast;
 Thou hadst been longer drawing out and thrusting
 Thy finger in the fire, than I was, ere
 The sign,¹ that followeth Taurus, I beheld,
 And enter'd its precinct. O glorious stars!
 O light impregnate with exceeding virtue!
 To whom whate'er of genius lifteth me
 Above the vulgar, grateful I refer;
 With ye the parent² of all mortal life
 Arose and set, when I did first inhale
 The Tuscan air; and afterward, when grace
 Vouchsafed me entrance to the lofty wheel³
 That in its orb impels ye, fate decreed
 My passage at your clime. To you my soul
 Devoutly sighs, for virtue, even now,
 To meet the hard emprise that draws me on.

"Thou art so near the sum of blessedness,"
 Said Beatrice, "that behoves thy ken
 Be vigilant and clear. And, to this end,
 Or ever thou advance thee further, hence
 Look downward, and contemplate, what a world
 Already stretch'd under our feet there lies:
 So as thy heart may, in its blithest mood,
 Present itself to the triumphal throng,
 Which, through the ethereal concave, comes rejoicing."

I straight obey'd; and with mine eye return'd
 Through all the seven spheres; and saw this globe

¹ *The sign.*—The constellation of Gemini.

² *The parent.*—The sun was in the constellation of the Twins at the time of Dante's birth.

³ *And afterward, when grace vouchsafed me entrance to the lofty wheel.*—The eighth heaven; that of the fixed stars.

⁴ *This globe.*—So Chaucer, "Troilus and Cresseide," b. v.:

"And down from thence fast he gan avise
 This little spot of earth, that with the sea

Embraced is, and fully gan despise
 This wretched world."

"All the world as to mine eye
 No more seemed than a prike."

Temple of Fame, b. ii.

Compare Cicero, "Somn. Scip.," "Jam ipsa terra ita mihi parva visa est," &c. Lucan, "Pharsalia," lib. ix. 11, and Tasso, "Gierusalemme Liberata," c. xiv., st. 9, 10, 11.

So pitiful of semblance, that perforce
 It moved my smiles: and him in truth I hold
 For wisest, who esteems it least; whose thoughts
 Elsewhere are fix'd, him worthiest call and best.
 I saw the daughter of Latona shine
 Without the shadow,¹ whereof late I deem'd
 That dense and rare were cause. Here I sustain'd
 The visage, Hyperion, of thy son;²
 And mark'd, how near him with their circles, round
 Move Maia and Dione;³ here discern'd
 Jove's tempering 'twixt his sire and son;⁴ and hence,
 Their changes and their various aspects,
 Distinctly scann'd. Nor might I not descry
 Of all the seven, how bulky each, how swift;
 Nor, of their several distances, not learn.
 This petty area (o'er the which we stride
 So fiercely), as along the eternal Twins
 I wound my way, appear'd before me all,
 Forth from the havens stretch'd unto the hills.
 Then, to the beauteous eyes, mine eyes return'd.

¹ *Without the shadow.*—See canto ii. 71.

² *Of thy son.*—The sun.

³ *Maia and Dione.*—The planets Mercury and

Venus: Dione being the mother of the latter, and Maia of the former deity.

⁴ *'Twixt his sire and son.*—Betwixt Saturn and Mars.