

CANTO XXV.

ARGUMENT

St. James questions our Poet concerning Hope. Next St. John appears; and, on perceiving that Dante looks intently on him, informs him that he (St. John) had left his body resolved into earth, upon the earth; and that Christ and the Virgin alone had come with their bodies into heaven.

IF e'er the sacred poem, that hath made
Both heaven and earth copartners in its toil,
And with lean abstinence, through many a year,
Faded my brow, be destined to prevail
Over the cruelty, which bars me forth
Of the fair sheep-fold,¹ where, a sleeping lamb,
The wolves set on and fain had worried me;
With other voice, and fleece of other grain,
I shall forthwith return; and, standing up
At my baptismal font, shall claim the wreath
Due to the poet's temples: for I there
First enter'd on the faith, which maketh souls
Acceptable to God: and, for its sake,²
Peter had then circled my forehead thus.

Next from the squadron, whence had issued forth
The first fruit of Christ's vicars on the earth,
Toward us moved a light, at view whereof
My Lady, full of gladness, spake to me:
Lo! lo! behold the peer of mickle might,
That makes Galicia throng'd with visitants.³

¹ *The fair sheep-fold.*—Florence, whence he was banished.

² *For its sake.*—For the sake of that faith.

³ *Galicia throng'd with visitants.*—See Mariana, "Hist.," lib. xi., cap. xiii., "En el tiempo," &c. "At the time that the sepulchre of the Apostle St. James was discovered, the devotion for that place extended itself not only over all Spain, but even

round about to foreign nations. Multitudes from all parts of the world came to visit it. Many others were deterred by the difficulty of the journey, by the roughness and barrenness of those parts, and by the incursions of the Moors, who made captives many of the pilgrims. The canons of St. Eloy, afterwards (the precise time is not known), with a desire of remedying these evils, built, in many places,

As when the ring-dove by his mate alights;
In circles, each about the other wheels,
And, murmuring, cooes his fondness: thus saw I
One, of the other¹ great and glorious prince,
With kindly greeting, hail'd; extolling, both,
Their heavenly banqueting: but when an end
Was to their gratulation, silent, each,
Before me sat they down, so burning bright,
I could not look upon them. Smiling then,
Beatrice spake: "O life in glory shrined!
Who² didst the largess³ of our kingly court
Set down with faithful pen; let now thy voice,
Of hope the praises, in this height resound.
For well thou know'st, who figurest it as oft,⁴
As Jesus, to ye three, more brightly shone."

"Lift up thy head; and be thou strong in trust:

along the whole road, which reached as far as to France, hospitals for the reception of the pilgrims." In the "Convito," p. 74, we find "la galassia," &c.: "the galaxy, that is, the white circle which the common people call the way of St. James;" on which Biscioni remarks: "The common people formerly considered the Milky Way as a sign by night to pilgrims, who were going to St. James of Galicia; and this perhaps arose from the resemblance of the word galaxy to Galicia. I have often," he adds, "heard women and peasants call it the Roman road," "la strada di Roma."

"Lo there (quod he) cast up thine eye,
Se yondir, lo! the Galaxie,
The whiche men clepe the milky way,
For it is white, and some per fay,
Ycallin it han Watlynge Strete."

Chaucer, the House of Fame, b. ii.

¹ *One, of the other.*—St. Peter and St. James.

² *Who.*—The Epistle of St. James is here attributed to the elder apostle of that name, whose shrine was at Compostella, in Galicia. Which of the two was the author of it, is yet doubtful. The learned and candid Michaelis contends very forcibly for its having been written by James the Elder. Lardner rejects that opinion as absurd: while Benson argues against it, but is well answered by Michaelis, who, after all, is obliged to leave the question undecided. See his Introduction to the New Testament, translated by Dr. Marsh, ed. Cambridge, 1793, vol. iv., cap. xxvi., § § 1, 2, 3. Mr. Horne supposes, that

as the elder James "was put to death by Herod Agrippa A.D. 44 (Acts xii.), it is evident that he was not the author of the epistle which bears the name of James, because it contains passages which refer to a later period, viz. v. 1—8, which intimates the then immediately approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and the subversion of the Jewish polity."—*Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, ed. 1818, vol. ii., p. 600.

³ *Largess.*—He appears to allude to the Epistle of James, i. 5: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Or, to v. 17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Some editions, however, read "l'allegrezza," "joy," instead of "la larghezza."

⁴ *As oft.*—Landino and Venturi, who read "Quanto," explains this, that the frequency with which James had commended the virtue of hope, was in proportion to the brightness in which Jesus had appeared at his transfiguration. Vellutello, who reads "Quante," supposes that James three times recommends patient hope in the last chapter of his Epistle; and that Jesus, as many times, showed his brightness to the three disciples; once when he cleansed the lepers (Luke v.); again when he raised the daughter of Jairus (Mark v.); and a third time when he was transfigured. As to Lombardi, who also reads "Quante," his construction of the passage seems to me scarcely intelligible.

And, as the words were ending, from above,
 "They hope in thee!" first heard we cried: whereto
 Answer'd the carols all. Amidst them next,
 A light of so clear amplitude emerged,
 That winter's month¹ were but a single day,
 Were such a crystal in the Cancer's sign.

Like as a virgin² riseth up, and goes,
 And enters on the mazes of the dance;
 Though gay, yet innocent of worse intent,
 Than to do fitting honour to the bride:
 So I beheld the new effulgence come
 Unto the other two, who in a ring
 Wheel'd, as became their rapture. In the dance,
 And in the song, it mingled. And the dame
 Held on them fix'd her looks; e'en as the spouse,
 Silent, and moveless. "This³ is he, who lay
 Upon the bosom of our pelican:
 This he, into whose keeping, from the cross,
 The mighty charge was given." Thus she spake:
 Yet therefore nought the more removed her sight
 From marking them: or e'er her words began,
 Or when they closed. As he, who looks intent,
 And strives with searching ken, how he may see
 The sun in his eclipse, and, through desire
 Of seeing, loseth power of sight; so I⁴

¹ *Winter's month*.—"If a luminary, like that which now appeared, were to shine throughout the month following the winter solstice, during which the constellation Cancer appears in the east at the setting of the sun, there would be no interruption to the light, but the whole month would be as a single day."

² *Like as a virgin*.—There is a pretty counterpart to this simile in the "Quadriregio" of Frezzi:

"Poi come donna, che fa reverenza
 Lassando il ballo, tal' atto fè ella."

Lib. iv., cap. v.

"Then as a lady, when she leaves the dance,
 Maketh obseance, even so did she."

The same writer has another more like that in the text:

"Come donzella, c'ha a guidar la danza,
 Che a chi l'invita reverenzia face,
 E po' incomincia vergognosa e manza,
 Così colei," &c. Lib. iv., cap. ii.

³ *This*.—St. John, who reclined on the bosom of our Saviour, and to whose charge Jesus recommended his mother.

⁴ *So I*.—He looked so earnestly, to descry whether St. John were present there in body, or in spirit only; having had his doubts raised by that saying of our Saviour's: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

Peer'd on that last resplendence, while I heard:
 "Why dazzlest thou thine eyes in seeking that,
 Which here abides not? Earth my body is,
 In earth; and shall be, with the rest, so long,
 As till our number equal the decree
 Of the Most High. The two that have ascended;
 In this our blessed cloister, shine alone¹
 With the two garments. So report below."

As when, for ease of labour, or to shun
 Suspected peril, at a whistle's breath,
 The oars, erewhile dash'd frequent in the wave,
 All rest: the flamy circle at that voice
 So rested; and the mingling sound was still,
 Which from the trinal band, soft-breathing, rose.
 I turn'd, but ah! how trembled in my thought,
 When, looking at my side again to see
 Beatrice, I descried her not; although,
 Not distant, on the happy coast she stood.

¹ *The two that have ascended, in this our blessed cloister, shine alone*.—Christ and Mary, whom he

has described in the last canto but one as rising above his sight.