

CANTO XXVII.

ARGUMENT.

St. Peter bitterly rebukes the covetousness of his successors in the apostolic see, while all the heavenly host sympathise in his indignation: they then vanish upwards. Beatrice bids Dante again cast his view below. Afterwards they are borne into the ninth heaven, of which she shows him the nature and properties; blaming the perverseness of man, who places his will on low and perishable things.

THEN "Glory to the Father, to the Son,
And to the Holy Spirit," rang aloud
Throughout all Paradise; that with the song
My spirit reel'd, so passing sweet the strain.
And what I saw was equal ecstasy:
One universal smile¹ it seem'd of all things;
Joy past compare; gladness unutterable;
Imperishable life of peace and love;
Exhaustless riches, and unmeasured bliss.

Before mine eyes stood the four torches² lit:
And that,³ which first had come, began to wax
In brightness; and, in semblance, such became,
As Jove might be, if he and Mars were birds,
And interchanged their plumes. Silence ensued,
Through the blest quire; by Him, who here appoints
Vicissitude of ministry, enjoin'd;
When thus I heard: "Wonder not, if my hue
Be changed; for, while I speak, these shalt thou see
All in like manner change with me. My place

¹ One universal smile.—

"Ivi ogni cosa intorno m'assembra
Un' allegrezza di giocondo riso."

Frezzi, Il Quadriregio, lib. iv., cap. ii.

"All things smiled."

Milton, Paradise Lost, b. viii. 265.

² Four torches.—St. Peter, St. James, St. John, and Adam.

³ And that.—St. Peter, who looked as the planet Jupiter would, if it assumed the sanguine appearance of Mars.

He¹ who usurps on earth (my place, ay, mine,
Which in the presence of the Son of God
Is void), the same hath made my cemetery
A common sewer of puddle and of blood:
The more below his triumph, who from hence
Malignant fell." Such colour,² as the sun,
At eve or morning, paints an adverse cloud,
Then saw I sprinkled over all the sky.
And as the unblemish'd dame, who, in herself
Secure from censure, yet at bare report
Of other's failing, shrinks with maiden fear;
So Beatrice, in her semblance, changed;
And such eclipse in heaven, methinks, was seen,
When the Most Holy suffer'd. Then the words
Proceeded, with voice, alter'd from itself
So clean, the semblance did not alter more.
"Not to this end was Christ's spouse with my blood,
With that of Linus, and of Cletus,³ fed;
That she might serve for purpose of base gold:
But for the purchase of this happy life,
Did Sextus, Pius, and Callixtus bleed,
And Urban;⁴ they, whose doom was not without
Much weeping seal'd. No purpose was of ours,⁵
That on the right hand of our successors,
Part of the Christian people should be set,
And part upon their left; nor that the keys,
Which were vouchsafed me, should for ensign serve
Unto the banners, that do levy war
On the baptized: nor I, for sigil-mark,

¹ He.—Boniface VIII.

² Such colour.—

"Qui color infectis adversi solis ab ictu
Nubibus esse solet; aut purpureæ Auroræ."

Ovid, Metamorphoses, lib. iii. 184.

³ Of Linus, and of Cletus.—Bishops of Rome in the first century.

⁴ Did Sextus, Pius, and Callixtus bleed, and Urban.—The former two, bishops of the same see, in the second, and the others in the fourth century.

⁵ No purpose was of ours.—"We did not intend that our successors should take any part in the political divisions among Christians; or that my figure (the seal of St. Peter) should serve as a mark to authorise iniquitous grants and privileges."

Set upon sold and lying privileges:
 Which makes me oft to bicker and turn red.
 In shepherd's clothing, greedy wolves¹ below
 Range wide o'er all the pastures. Arm of God!
 Why longer sleep'st thou? Cahorsines and Gascons²
 Prepare to quaff our blood. O good beginning!
 To what a vile conclusion must thou stoop.
 But the high providence, which did defend,
 Through Scipio, the world's empery for Rome,
 Will not delay its succour: and thou, son,³
 Who through thy mortal weight shalt yet again
 Return below, open thy lips, nor hide
 What is by me not hidden." As a flood
 Of frozen vapours streams adown the air,
 What time the she-goat⁴ with her skiey horn
 Touches the sun; so saw I there stream wide
 The vapours, who with us had linger'd late,
 And with glad triumph deck the ethereal cope.
 Onward my sight their semblances pursued;
 So far pursued, as till the space between
 From its reach sever'd them: whereat the guide
 Celestial, marking me no more intent
 On upward gazing, said, "Look down, and see
 What circuit thou hast compast." From the hour⁵
 When I before had cast my view beneath,
 All the first region overpast I saw,
 Which from the midmost to the boundary winds;
 That onward, thence, from Gades,⁶ I beheld

¹ *Wolves*.—"Wolves shall succeed to teachers, grievous wolves."
Milton, Paradise Lost, b. xii. 508.

² *Cahorsines and Gascons*.—He alludes to Jacques d'Ossa, a native of Cahors, who filled the papal chair in 1316, after it had been two years vacant, and assumed the name of John XXII., and to Clement V., a Gascon, of whom see "Hell," c. xix., 86, and note.

³ *Thou, son*.—"Beatus Petrus—multaque locutus est, et docuit me de veteri testamento, de hominibus

etiam adhuc in seculo adhuc viventibus plura peccata intonuit mihi, precepitque, ut ea quæ de illis audieram eis referrem."—*Alberici Visio*, § 45.

⁴ *What time the she-goat*.—When the sun is in Capricorn.

⁵ *From the hour*.—Since he had last looked (see canto xxii.) he perceived that he had passed from the meridian circle to the eastern horizon; the half of our hemisphere, and a quarter of the heaven.

⁶ *From Gades*.—See "Hell," canto xxvi. 106.

The unwise passage of Laertes' son;
 And hitherward the shore,¹ where thou, Europa,
 Madest thee a joyful burden; and yet more
 Of this dim spot had seen, but that the sun,²
 A constellation off and more, had ta'en
 His progress in the zodiac underneath.

Then by the spirit, that doth never leave
 Its amorous dalliance with my lady's looks,
 Back with redoubled ardour were mine eyes
 Led unto her: and from her radiant smiles,
 Whenas I turn'd me, pleasure so divine
 Did lighten on me, that whatever bait
 Or art or nature in the human flesh,
 Or in its limn'd resemblance, can combine
 Through greedy eyes to take the soul withal,
 Were, to her beauty, nothing. Its boon influence
 From the fair nest of Leda³ rapt me forth,
 And wafted on into the swiftest heaven.

What place for entrance Beatrice chose,
 I may not say; so uniform was all,
 Liveliest and loftiest. She my secret wish
 Divined; and, with such gladness, that God's love
 Seem'd from her visage shining, thus began:
 "Here is the goal, whence motion on his race
 Starts: motionless the centre, and the rest
 All moved around. Except the soul divine,
 Place in this heaven is none; the soul divine,
 Wherein the love, which ruleth o'er its orb,
 Is kindled, and the virtue, that it sheds:
 One circle, light and love, enclasping it,
 As this doth clasp the others; and to Him,

¹ *The shore*.—Phœnicia, where Europa, the daughter of Agenor, mounted on the back of Jupiter, in his shape of a bull.

² *The sun*.—Dante was in the constellation of Gemini, and the sun in Aries. There was, there-

fore, part of those two constellations, and the whole of Taurus, between them.

³ *The fair nest of Leda*.—"From the Gemini;" thus called because Leda was the mother of the twins Castor and Pollux.

Who draws the bound, its limit only known.
 Measured itself by none, it doth divide
 Motion to all, counted unto them forth,
 As by the fifth or half ye count forth ten.
 The vase, wherein time's roots¹ are plunged, thou seest:
 Look elsewhere for the leaves. O mortal lust!
 That canst not lift thy head above the waves
 Which whelm and sink thee down. The will in man
 Bears goodly blossoms; but its ruddy promise
 Is, by the dripping of perpetual rain,
 Made mere abortion: faith and innocence
 Are met with but in babes; each taking leave,
 Ere cheeks with down are sprinkled: he, that fasts
 While yet a stammerer, with his tongue let loose
 Gluts every food alike in every moon:
 One, yet a babbler, loves and listens to
 His mother; but no sooner hath free use
 Of speech, than he doth wish her in her grave.
 So suddenly doth the fair child of him,²
 Whose welcome is the morn and eve his parting,
 To negro blackness change her virgin white.
 "Thou, to abate thy wonder, note, that none³
 Bears rule in earth; and its frail family
 Are therefore wanderers. Yet before the date,⁴

¹ *Time's roots*.—"Here," says Beatrice, "are the roots, from whence time springs: for the parts, into which it is divided, the other heavens must be considered." And she then breaks out into an exclamation on the degeneracy of human nature, which does not lift itself to the contemplation of divine things. Thus in the "Quadriregio," lib. ii., cap. vi.:

"Il tempo, e'l ciel, che sopra noi e volto,
 E una cosa, e non voltando il cielo, ●
 Ciò che da tempo pende saria tolto."

"Time, and the heaven that turneth o'er our heads,
 Are but as one; and if the heaven turn'd not,
 That, which depends on time, were done away."

² *The fair child of him*.—There is something very similar in our author's treatise "De Monarchiâ," lib. i., p. 104: "Humanum genus filius est celi quod est perfectissimum in omni opere suo. Generat enim homo hominem et sol juxta secundum in Naturali

Auditu." This, therefore, is intended for a philosophical truth, and not for a figure, as when Pindar calls "the day" "child of the sun:"

Ἀνέραν
 . . . παῖδ' Ἀλίου. *Ol.*, ii. 59.

³ *None*.—Because, as has been before said, the shepherds are become wolves.

⁴ *Before the date*.—"Before many ages are past; before those fractions, which are dropt in the reckoning of every year, shall amount to so large a portion of time, that January shall be no more a winter month." By this periphrasis is meant "in a short time;" as we say familiarly, such a thing will happen before a thousand years are over, when we mean it will happen soon. Thus Petrarch:

"Ben sa ch' il prova, e fiati cosa piana
 Anzi mill' anni." *Trionfo d'Amore*, cap. i.

When, through the hundredth in his reckoning dropt,
 Pale January must be shoved aside
 From winter's calendar, these heavenly spheres
 Shall roar so loud, that fortune shall be fain¹
 To turn the poop, where she hath now the prow;
 So that the fleet run onward: and true fruit,
 Expected long, shall crown at last the bloom."

¹ *Fortune shall be fain*.—The commentators, in general, suppose that our poet here augurs that great reform, which he vainly hoped would follow on the arrival of the Emperor Henry VII. in Italy. Lombardi refers the prognostication to Can Grande della Scala: and when we consider that this canto

was not finished till after the death of Henry, as appears from the mention that is made of John XXII., it cannot be denied but the conjecture is probable. Troya ("Veltro Allegorico," p. 186) suggests Matteo Visconti, or Castruccio Castracani, as the expected reformer.