

With prompt affection welcometh the guest.
 Now, without further help, if with good heed
 My words thy mind have treasured, thou henceforth
 This consistory round about mayst scan,
 And gaze thy fill. But, since thou hast on earth
 Heard vain disputers, reasoners in the schools,
 Canvass the angelic nature, and dispute
 Its powers of apprehension, memory, choice;
 Therefore, 'tis well thou take from me the truth,
 Pure and without disguise; which they below,
 Equivocating, darken and perplex.

“Know thou, that, from the first, these substances,
 Rejoicing in the countenance of God,
 Have held unceasingly their view, intent
 Upon the glorious vision, from the which
 Nought absent is nor hid: where then no change
 Of newness, with succession, interrupts,
 Remembrance, there, needs none to gather up
 Divided thought and images remote.

“So that men, thus at variance with the truth,
 Dream, though their eyes be open; reckless some
 Of error; others well aware they err,
 To whom more guilt and shame are justly due.
 Each the known track of sage philosophy
 Deserts, and has a by-way of his own:
 So much the restless eagerness to shine,
 And love of singularity, prevail.
 Yet this, offensive as it is, provokes
 Heaven's anger less, than when the book of God
 Is forced to yield to man's authority,
 Or from its straightness warp'd: no reckoning made
 What blood the sowing of it in the world
 Has cost; what favour for himself he wins,

“meritorio,” “concistorio,” and “adjutorio.” The
 reading is probably right, but I find it in Landi-

no's edition of 1484, and Vellutello's of 1544; and
 it may, perhaps, be in many others.



59

In fashion, as a snow-white rose, lay then
Before my view the saintly multitude,
Which in his own blood Christ espoused.
Canto XXXI. Lines 1-3.

99-129

PARADISE.—CANTO XXIX.

373

Who meekly clings to it. The aim of all
Is how to shine: e'en they, whose office is
To preach the gospel, let the gospel sleep,
And pass their own inventions off instead.
One tells, how at Christ's suffering the wan moon
Bent back her steps, and shadow'd o'er the sun
With intervenient disk, as she withdrew:
Another, how the light shrouded itself
Within its tabernacle, and left dark
The Spaniard, and the Indian, with the Jew
Such fables Florence in her pulpit hears,
Bandied about more frequent, than the names
Of Bindi and of Lapi¹ in her streets.
The sheep,² meanwhile, poor witless ones, return
From pasture, fed with wind: and what avails
For their excuse, they do not see their harm?
Christ said not to his first conventicle,
'Go forth and preach impostures to the world,'
But gave them truth³ to build on; and the sound
Was mighty on their lips: nor needed they,
Beside the gospel, other spear or shield,
To aid them in their warfare for the faith.
The preacher⁴ now provides himself with store
Of jests and gibes; and, so there be no lack
Of laughter, while he vents them, his big cowl
Distends, and he has won the meed he sought:
Could but the vulgar catch a glimpse the while
Of that dark bird which nestles in his hood,
They scarce would wait to hear the blessing said,
Which now the dotards hold in such esteem,
That every counterfeit, who spreads abroad

¹ *Of Bindi and of Lapi.*—Common names of men at Florence.

² *The sheep.*—So Milton, "Lycidas."

³ *The hungry sheep look up and are not fed, But swoln with wind and the rank mist they draw, Rot inwardly."*

⁴ *But gave them truth.*—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."—Mark xvi. 15.

⁵ *The preacher.*—Thus Cowper, "Task," b. ii.:

"'Tis pitiful
To court a grin when you should woo a soul," &c.

The hands of holy promise, finds a throng
Of credulous fools beneath. Saint Anthony
Fattens with this his swine,¹ and others worse
Than swine, who diet at his lazy board,
Paying with unstampt metal² for their fare.

"But (for we far have wander'd) let us seek
The forward path again; so as the way
Be shorten'd with the time. No mortal tongue,
Nor thought of man, hath ever reach'd so far,
That of these natures he might count the tribes.
What Daniel³ of their thousands hath reveal'd,
With finite number, infinite conceals.
The fountain, at whose source these drink their beams,
With light supplies them in as many modes,
As there are splendours that it shines on: each
According to the virtue it conceives,
Differing in love and sweet affection.
Look then how lofty and how huge in breadth
The eternal might, which, broken and dispersed
Over such countless mirrors, yet remains
Whole in itself and one, as at the first."

¹ *St. Anthony fattens with this his swine.*—On the sale of these blessings, the brothers of St. Anthony supported themselves and their paramours. From behind the swine of St. Anthony, our poet levels a blow at the object of his inveterate enmity, Boniface VIII., from whom, "in 1297, they obtained the dignity and privileges of an independent congregation." See Mosheim's "Ecclesiastical History," in

Dr. Maclaine's translation, v. ii., cent xi., p. ii., c. ii., § 28.

² *Paying with unstampt metal.*—With false indulgences.

³ *Daniel.*—"Thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him."—Dan. vii. 10.

CANTO XXX.

ARGUMENT.

Dante is taken up with Beatrice into the empyrean; and there having his sight strengthened by her aid, and by the virtue derived from looking on the river of light, he sees the triumph of the angels and of the souls of the blessed.

NOON'S fervid hour perchance six thousand miles¹
From hence is distant; and the shadowy cone
Almost to level on our earth declines;
When, from the midmost of this blue abyss,
By turns some star is to our vision lost.
And straightway as the handmaid of the sun
Puts forth her radiant brow, all, light by light,
Fade; and the spangled firmament shuts in,
E'en to the loveliest of the glittering throng.
Thus vanish'd gradually from my sight
The triumph, which plays ever round the point,
That overcame me, seeming (for it did)
Engirt² by that it girdeth. Wherefore love,
With loss of other object, forced me bend
Mine eyes on Beatrice once again.

If all, that hitherto is told of her,
Were in one praise concluded, 'twere too weak
To furnish out this turn.³ Mine eyes did look
On beauty, such, as I believe in sooth,
Not merely to exceed our human; but,

¹ *Six thousand miles.*—He compares the vanishing of the vision to the fading away of the stars at dawn, when it is noon-day six thousand miles off, and the shadow formed by the earth over the part of it inhabited by the poet, is about to disappear.

² *Engirt.*—"Appearing to be encompassed by

these angelic bands, which are in reality encompassed by it."

³ *This turn.*—"Questa vice." Hence perhaps Milton, "Paradise Lost," b. viii. 491:

"This turn hath made amends."