

## CANTO XXXII.

### ARGUMENT.

St. Bernard shows him, on their several thrones, the other blessed souls, both of the Old and New Testament; explains to him that their places are assigned them by grace, and not according to merit; and lastly, tells him that if he would obtain power to descry what remained of the heavenly vision, he must unite with him in supplication to Mary.

**F**REELY the sage, though wrapt in musings high,  
 Assumed the teacher's part, and mild began:  
 "The wound that Mary closed she' open'd first,  
 Who sits so beautiful at Mary's feet.  
 The third in order, underneath her, lo!  
 Rachel with Beatrice: Sarah next;  
 Judith; Rebecca; and the gleaner-maid,  
 Meek ancestress<sup>2</sup> of him, who sang the songs  
 Of sore repentance in his sorrowful mood.  
 All, as I name them, down from leaf to leaf,  
 Are, in gradation, throned on the rose.  
 And from the seventh step, successively,  
 Adown the breathing tresses of the flower,  
 Still doth the file of Hebrew dames proceed.  
 For these are a partition wall, whereby  
 The sacred stairs are sever'd, as the faith  
 In Christ divides them. On this part, where blooms  
 Each leaf in full maturity, are set  
 Such as in Christ, or e'er he came, believed.  
 On the other, where an intersected space  
 Yet shows the semicircle void, abide  
 All they, who look'd to Christ already come.

<sup>1</sup> *The wound that Mary closed she.*—Eve.  
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<sup>2</sup> *Ancestress.*—Ruth, the ancestress of David.

And as our Lady on her glorious stool,  
 And they who on their stools beneath her sit,  
 This way distinction make; e'en so on his,  
 The mighty Baptist that way marks the line  
 (He who endured the desert, and the pains  
 Of martyrdom, and, for two years,<sup>1</sup> of hell,  
 Yet still continued holy), and beneath,  
 Augustin;<sup>2</sup> Francis;<sup>3</sup> Benedict;<sup>4</sup> and the rest,  
 Thus far from round to round. So heaven's decree  
 Forecasts, this garden, equally to fill,  
 With faith in either view, past or to come.  
 Learn too, that downward from the step, which cleaves,  
 Midway, the twain compartments, none there are  
 Who place obtain for merit of their own,  
 But have through others' merit been advanced,  
 On set conditions; spirits all released,  
 Ere for themselves they had the power to chuse.  
 And, if thou mark and listen to them well,  
 Their childish looks and voice declare as much.

"Here, silent as thou art, I know thy doubt;  
 And gladly will I loose the knot, wherein  
 Thy subtil thoughts have bound thee. From this realm  
 Excluded, chance no entrance here may find;  
 No more than hunger, thirst, or sorrow can.  
 A law immutable hath stablish'd all;  
 Nor is there aught thou seest, that doth not fit,  
 Exactly, as the finger to the ring.  
 It is not, therefore, without cause, that these,  
 O'erspeedy comers to immortal life,  
 Are different in their shares of excellence.  
 Our Sovran Lord, that settleth this estate  
 In love and in delight so absolute,

<sup>1</sup> *Two years.*—The time that elapsed between the  
 death of the Baptist and his redemption by the  
 death of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> *Augustin.*—Bishop of Hippo, in the fourth cen-

tury; the celebrated writer who has been mentioned  
 before, canto x. 117.

<sup>3</sup> *Francis.*—See canto xi.

<sup>4</sup> *Benedict.*—See canto xxii.



That wish can dare no further, every soul,  
 Created in his joyous sight to dwell,  
 With grace, at pleasure, variously<sup>1</sup> endows.  
 And for a proof the effect may well suffice  
 And 'tis moreover most expressly mark'd  
 In holy Scripture,<sup>2</sup> where the twins are said  
 To have struggled in the womb. Therefore, as grace  
 Inweaves the coronet, so every brow  
 Weareth its proper hue of orient light.  
 And merely in respect to his prime gift,  
 Not in reward of meritorious deed,  
 Hath each his several degree assign'd.  
 In early times with their own innocence  
 More was not wanting, than the parents' faith,  
 To save them: those first ages past, behoved  
 That circumcision in the males should imp  
 The flight of innocent wings: but since the day  
 Of grace hath come, without baptismal rites  
 In Christ accomplish'd, innocence herself  
 Must linger yet below. Now raise thy view  
 Unto the visage most resembling Christ:  
 For, in her splendour only, shalt thou win  
 The power to look on him." Forthwith I saw  
 Such floods of gladness on her visage shower'd,  
 From holy spirits, winging that profound;  
 That, whatsoever I had yet beheld,  
 Had not so much suspended me with wonder,  
 Or shown me such similitude of God.

<sup>1</sup> *Variously*.—There can be no doubt but that "Intra se," and not "Entrassi," is the right reading at v. 60 of the original. The former seems to have been found in only a few MSS.; but it appears from Landino's notes that he had intended to adopt it; although Lombardi has been, as far as I know, the first to admit it into the text.

<sup>2</sup> *In holy Scripture*.—"And the children struggled together within her."—Gen. xxv. 22. "When Rebekah also had conceived by one, even by our

father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the promise of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger."—Rom. ix. 10, 11, 12. Care must be taken that the doctrine of election is not pushed further than St. Paul appears to have intended by his text, which regards the preference of the Jews to the Gentiles, and not merely the dhoice of particular persons, without any respect to merit.

And he, who had to her descended, once,  
 On earth, now hail'd in heaven; and on poised wing,  
 "Ave, Maria, gratia plena," sang:  
 To whose sweet anthem all the blissful court,  
 From all parts answering, rang: that holier joy  
 Brooded the deep serene. "Father revered!  
 Who deign'st, for me, to quit the pleasant place  
 Wherein thou sittest, by eternal lot;  
 Say, who that angel is, that with such glee  
 Beholds our queen, and so enamour'd glows  
 Of her high beauty, that all fire he seems."

So I again resorted to the lore  
 Of my wise teacher, he, whom Mary's charms  
 Embellish'd, as the sun the morning star;  
 Who thus in answer spake: "In him are summ'd,  
 Whate'er of buxomness and free delight  
 May be in spirit, or in angel, met:  
 And so beseems: for that he bare the palm  
 Down unto Mary, when the Son of God  
 Vouchsafed to clothe him in terrestrial weeds.  
 Now let thine eyes wait heedful on my words;  
 And note thou of this just and pious realm  
 The chiefest nobles. Those, highest in bliss,  
 The twain, on each hand next our empress throned,  
 Are as it were two roots unto this rose:  
 He to the left, the parent, whose rash taste  
 Proves bitter to his seed: and, on the right,  
 That ancient father of the holy church,  
 Into whose keeping Christ did give the keys  
 Of this sweet flower; near whom behold the seer,<sup>1</sup>  
 That, ere he died, saw all the grievous times  
 Of the fair bride, who with the lance and nails  
 Was won. And, near unto the other, rests  
 The leader, under whom, on manna, fed

<sup>1</sup> *Near whom behold the seer*.—St. John.



The ungrateful nation, fickle, and perverse.  
On the other part, facing to Peter, lo!  
Where Anna sits, so well content to look  
On her loved daughter, that with moveless eye  
She chants the loud hosanna: while, opposed  
To the first father of your mortal kind,  
Is Lucia,<sup>1</sup> at whose hest thy lady sped,  
When on the edge of ruin closed thine eye.

"But (for the vision hasteneth to an end)  
Here break we off, as the good workman doth,  
That shapes the cloak according to the cloth;  
And to the primal love our ken shall rise;  
That thou mayst penetrate the brightness, far  
As sight can bear thee. Yet, alas! in sooth  
Beating thy pennons, thinking to advance,  
Thou backward fall'st. Grace then must first be gain'd;  
Her grace, whose might can help thee. Thou in prayer  
Seek her: and, with affection, whilst I sue,  
Attend, and yield me all thy heart." He said;  
And thus the saintly orison began.

<sup>1</sup> Lucia.—See "Hell," canto ii. 97, and "Purgatory," ix. 50.

## CANTO XXXIII.

### ARGUMENT.

St. Bernard supplicates the Virgin Mary that Dante may have grace given him to contemplate the brightness of the divine Majesty, which is accordingly granted; and Dante then himself prays to God for ability to show forth some part of the celestial glory in his writings. Lastly, he is admitted to a glimpse of the great mystery; the Trinity, and the union of man with God.

"O VIRGIN mother,<sup>1</sup> daughter of thy Son!  
Created beings all in lowliness  
Surpassing, as in height above them all;  
Term by the eternal counsel pre-ordain'd;  
Ennobler of thy nature, so advanced  
In thee, that its great Maker did not scorn,  
To make himself his own creation;<sup>2</sup>  
For in thy womb rekindling shone the love  
Reveal'd, whose genial influence makes now  
This flower to germin in eternal peace:  
Here thou to us, of charity and love,

<sup>1</sup> O virgin mother.—

"Thou maide and mother daughter of thy son,  
Thou wel of mercy, sinful soules cure,  
In whom that God of bountee chees to won;  
Thou humble and high over every creature,  
Thou nobledest so far forth our nature,  
That no disdaine the maker had of kinde  
His son in blood and flesh to clothe and winde.

Within the cloistre blisful of thy sides  
Toke mannes shape the eternal love and pees,  
That of the trine compas Lord and guide is,  
Whom erthe, and sea, and heaven out of rellees  
Ay herien; and thou virgin wemmeles  
Bare of thy body (and dweltest maiden pure)  
The Creatour of every creature.

Assembled in thee magnificence  
With mercy, goodness, and with such pitee,  
That thou that art the sunne of excellence  
Not only helpst hem that praisen thee,  
But oftentime of thy benigntee

Ful freely, or that men thin helpe beseche,  
Thou goest beforne, and art hir lives leche."

Chaucer, *The Second Nonnes Tale*.

In the stanza preceding these, Chaucer alludes to St. Bernard's writings:

"And thou that art flour of virgins all,  
Of whom that Bernard list so well to write."

<sup>2</sup> To make himself his own creation.—

"Non si sdegnò di farsi sua fattura."

I had translated this line,

"Himself in his own work enclosed to dwell,"

and have corrected it at the suggestion of my friend, the Rev. William Digby, who points out a parallel passage in Bishop Hopkins, on the Lord's Prayer, ed. 1692, p. 190. "In Him omnipotence became weak; eternity, mortal; innocence itself, guilty; God, man; the Creator, a creature; the Maker of all, his own workmanship."