

CANTO THIRTY-FIRST.

ARGUMENT :

The saintly multitude was arranged like the leaves of a great white Rose, effulgent, and sharing the light of an effulgence of which the centre, infinitely glorious, was God ; while the heavenly choirs now soared aloft to gaze upon God, now descended into the leaves of the Rose. Saint Bernard, approaching Dante, shows him Beatrice enthroned, and she rewards his gaze with a smile. The saint then directed his attention to the Blessed Virgin, from whose seat flashed radiance, while waved around her their banners thousands of Angels.

The Empyrean.

PERSONS SPEAKING : Saint Bernard. Dante.

PERSONS APPEARING : The immediate presence of God. The Blessed Virgin. The celestial multitudes. The heavenly choirs. The Rose of the Blessed. The eminently happy exalted to the Empyrean. Beatrice enthroned.

AND so, in form a snow-white Rose, these seats
Displayed to me the saintly host allied
By Christ's own blood to Him, and made His
Bride.

But th' other host that, winged, with anthems greets
His glory who doth fill it with his love,
And gave it, kind, such noble birth above,
Even as a swarm of bees that, now sunk deep
In flowers, again through sunlight soars
To where it all its labors' sweetness stores,

Into the mighty flower sank down, to reap 10
 Its leaves' so lucent sweets, and then,
 To where its love lives ever, rose again.
Of living flame their faces were, and gold
 Their wings, and all the rest so white
 No snow e'er shone with dazzling gleam so
 bright.
And as from tier to tier their legions rolled,
 They somewhat kindled of that zeal and peace
 Wherein wings fanning loins showed their in-
 crease.

Nor came of shadow aught, betwixt the flower 19
 And that impending host, nor view
 Impeding; shone its splendor through;
For hath the light divine such piercing power
 The universe throughout, as merit claims,
 That obstacle none defeats its arrows' aims.
This realm secure, replete with peace and joy,
 And thronged with people ancient, and with new,
 For all its gaze and love but one Point knew.

O Trinal Light, which doth their sight enjoy, 28
 Let thy star's single glory cast its glow
 Upon our frowning tempest here below!
If the barbarians, roaming from some land
 Which sees forever Helice beam on high,
 Pleased, with her son, to tread the polar sky,
Beholding Rome and all her structures grand,
 Were wonder-struck, when was the Lateran fair
 Above all things mortality may impair,

I, who from human to divine had passed, 37
From time unto eternity, the plain
That Florence holds to people just and sane,
What strong amazement held me fettered fast !
This, and my joy together, not to speak
My pleasure made it, nor discourse to seek.
And, as a pilgrim, whose delighted awe
Takes in the temple of his vow, his heart
In high hope some day all he sees to impart,

So, wheresoe'er the radiant ranks I saw, 46
Now up, now down, and to the furthest bound,
Those living lights mine eyes I compassed round.
I faces saw, where moved sweet charity's dance,
Faces which His light, and their own smile,
graced,
Gestures where every charm its seal had placed.
The general form of Paradise had my glance
Thus comprehended, and not yet my mind
Had been to any special part confined,

When turned I round again with kindling thought 55
To ask my Lady to renew her speech,
And me, not sure of things suspended, teach.
An answer came, but not from her I sought ;
I deemed I should see Beatrice, but mine eyes
An Old Man saw, with vesture of the skies.
With joy benignant glowed his eyes and face,
His attitude seemed all made of pity kind,
Such as we in the tenderest fathers find.

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Saint Bernard.

And "She, where is she?" thus my words found
place. 64

"Me Beatrice sends to thee from mine own seat,
That in her stead thy wishes I may meet.
And if thou dost the first rank's third round scan
Thou shalt her see where hath desert enthroned
Her merits high which Heaven's decree hath
owned."

Replied I not, but swift mine eyesight ran,
And found her seated, and in guise so bright
She seemed a crown reflecting infinite light.

Not from the loftiest place where thunders roll 73
Is any mortal eye so distant, placed
Where are the deepest sea-floor's windings traced,
As mine from Beatrice was, but no control
Had distance here ; here form was not obscure
Through medium made, but clear came down and
pure.

"O Lady! Fount wherefrom my hope hath grown!
Thou who, that I might safe be, deemed it meet
In Hell to leave the imprint of thy feet!

"For all mine eyes have seen, I freely own 82
The virtue and the grace, as from thy power
And bounty coming, as a freshening shower.
To me, a slave, comes freedom in the end,
By all expedients brought, through ways divine
That power had yielded into hands of thine.
Do thou me still thy generous aid extend,
So that this soul of mine, by thee made fair,
May, to thee pleasing, from its body fare."

Dante lost in Wonder.

And she, so distant, seemed to make a smile 91
Her answer; and a look I further earned;
But then she to the Eternal Fountain turned.
“That close,” my blest guide said to me the while,
“Of this thy journey thou may’st gain, have
prayer
And love divine thee given into my care.
Let, then, thy vision fly, around, above;
To contemplate these beauties will prepare
Its mounting higher to radiant scenes more rare.

“And she, Heaven’s Queen, whom I with all of
love 100
Adore that ardor gives, will yield all grace;
She knows full well her faithful Bernard’s face.”
And, e’en as he whom some Croatian glade
Sends forth to gaze at our Veronica, known
To holy fame, and dear to pilgrims grown,
Says in his thought, the while it is displayed,
“And was like this thy very look adored,
O thou true God, Christ Jesus and my Lord?”

Such was I there, while I, of this blest man, 109
Gazed at the living charity, he whom here
Brought contemplation to that Peace so near.
“This glad life, son of grace,” thus pleasing ran
His speech, “thou may’st not wholly know, if
place
Thou shouldst thine eyes upon the lowest space;
But follow on the circles, far and far,
Until thou shalt the Queen enthroned behold,
Whom all her realm doth reverently enfold.”

I raised mine eyes ; and, as the morning star 118
A lustre greater heralds that attends
The western skies when day's long journey ends,
Thus, as mine eyes their journey made elate
From vale to mount, I saw a part surpass,
Remote, the splendor of the greater mass :
And, even as there, where we the pole await
By Phaëthon illy-guided, blazes higher
The light, while slackens on the sides its fire,

So did that oriflamme high, which meek peace
brings, 127
Gleam brightest in the centre, while became,
On either side, more dim the lessening flame.
And at that centre, with expanded wings,
Of jubilant Angels, thousands met my gaze,
Effulgent all, but graced in various ways.
I at their songs and sports saw Beauty smile
A smile which gladness gave to those redeemed
Shown in the light which from their faces beamed.

E'en had I wealth of speech and brilliant style 136
To mine imagination suited, ne'er would I
The smallest part of that enchantment try.
Bernard, as soon as he saw me intent
Upon that fervid fervor, turned his gaze
With such intense affection t'wards its rays,
That with my soul warmth yet unknown was blent.