

## CANTO XXVIII

Filled with wonder and curiosity, Dante slowly ventures forth to explore. A sweet and gentle east wind strikes his forehead and inclines the branches towards the Orient, without, however, disturbing the birds chirping within them. Soon he comes upon an incomparably clear, shady stream flowing north and bending the blades of grass in its flow. As he pauses to inspect the great variety of flowering trees beyond the water, Matelda, a symbol of original innocence and earthly felicity, appears on the other side, singing and gathering the meadow's blooms (1–42). She seems enamored and, in the eternal spring, reminds the Pilgrim of Persephone. When he asks her to draw near so that he can understand her song, she dances gracefully towards him with modest eyes, coming close enough for her words to be intelligible. At the bank, she raises her eyes, which glisten like those of Venus in love with Adonis, and smiles. The three steps that separate the Poet from her now seem more odious than the stormy Hellespont did to Leander. She then ascribes her joy to delight in the Creator's handiwork (43–84). If, as Statius had said, the mountain suffers no meteorological change, Dante wonders how there can be rain to replenish the stream and wind blowing in the trees. Matelda explains that God had created the Garden of Eden as a pledge of eternal peace, which the first couple soon forfeited through sin. It is not disturbed by climactic changes; rather, the revolutions of the Primum Mobile cause the gentle breeze, filling the woods with its music and scattering the seeds of its plants around the earth. Furthermore, a fountain springs forth by the Divine Will and divides into Lethe, the river of forgetfulness of sin, and Eunoe, the river of remembrance of good deeds. By way of a corollary, she adds finally that the ancient poets who sang of the Golden Age had darkly intuited the Earthly Paradise. At this, the Pilgrim looks to Virgil and Statius, and they smile (85–148).

<sup>1</sup> Inside, all round, I now was keen to spy The godly woods, whose verdant  
thickness went  
To temper that new daylight to the eye.

<sup>4</sup> No longer waiting, from the bank I bent My way, quite slowly taking in the  
field,  
On soil which breathed all round its fragrant scent.

<sup>7</sup> Sweet air, in which no changing is revealed, Was striking on my forehead but  
displayed  
No greater force than gentle breezes wield.

10 And from that wind the trembling branches swayed As all bent freely  
downwards to the part  
Where first the holy mountain casts its shade;[\[473\]](#)

13 Yet from the upright they did not depart So much that fledglings in the tops  
at times  
Would cease from exercising all their art.

16 The morning hours were greeted by the chimes They sang within the  
branches—full of glee— Which kept an undertone to all their rhymes,[\[474\]](#)  
19 Like that heard gathering from tree to tree Throughout the pine grove on  
Chiassi's shore,  
When Aeolus has set Sirocco free.[\[475\]](#)

22 Now, going step by step, I slowly bore So deep within the ancient forest land  
I could not see where I'd come in before.

25 But there a stream had blocked my progress, and Its little waves bent to the  
left-hand side[\[476\]](#)  
The blades of grass that issued from its strand.

28 All waters that are here most purified Would seem to have some cloudiness  
quite soon  
Compared with those, in which no thing can hide,

31 Although, with lasting shadows overstrewn, They flow quite darkly for that  
shade allows  
No ray to enter in of sun or moon.

34 With feet I stayed; with eyes I passed to browse Beyond that little river and  
to see  
The great variety of blooming boughs.

37 And there appeared to me (as suddenly A thing appears whose wondrousness  
will rout  
In us whatever other thoughts may be)

40 A lady all alone, who went about[\[477\]](#)  
To sing and gather bloom on bloom from ways  
That had been painted there with them throughout.

43 “Ah, lovely lady, you who at love’s rays[\[478\]](#)  
Have warmed yourself (if I may trust your look,  
That wonted witness of a heart ablaze),

46 That I may understand,” I undertook To say to her, “the melody you sing,  
Draw nearer, should it please you, to this brook.

49 You bring to mind both where and what a thing Persephone once was, when  
she was reft[\[479\]](#)  
So that her mother lost her, she the spring.”

52 As in a dance, a lady turns and, deft, Keeps both feet near the floor, together  
bound,  
And scarcely moves the right before the left,

55 On red and yellow blooms she thus turned round And came to me, not  
otherwise than should  
A modest maid, her eyes upon the ground.

58 She satisfied my prayers as through the wood She drew so near that sounds  
of sweet replies  
Could come to me, their meanings understood.

61 As soon as she was where the grass there lies First bathed by ripples of the  
lovely stream,  
She gave to me a gift of lifted eyes.

64 I do not think there sparkled such a gleam Beneath the lids of Venus when  
her child  
Had pierced her, though against his wonted scheme.[\[480\]](#)

67 Erect, upon the other bank, she smiled; Her hands arranged the blooms  
diversely dyed,  
Which on those highlands with no seed grow wild

which on those highlands, with no seed, grow wild.

70 Three steps the river kept me from her side, But Hellespont where Xerxes  
crossed the strait[481]  
—And this is still a curb on human pride—

73 Had suffered from Leander no more hate[482]  
When storms from Sestos to Abydos ran  
Than that from me, unopened to my gait.

76 “You’re new here, and perhaps,” so she began, “Because I’m smiling in this  
place elect,  
The chosen nest for all the race of man,

79 Some doubt has made you wonder. I expect The *Delectasti*-psalm will light  
you three[483]  
And therefore may uncloud your intellect.

82 And you who stand in front and made your plea, Should you wish more, I’m  
ready to pursue  
Your questions till you’ve heard enough from me.”

85 “The water and the sounds of forests too Impugn my recent faith,” I had to  
say,[484]  
“In things I’ve heard, opposed to what I view.”

88 “I’ll tell you how the things that make you prey To wonder issue from their  
cause,” said she,  
“And clear the mist offending you away.

91 The highest, sole self-pleasing Good is He Who made man good—and for  
good—in a place[485]  
He gave as pledge of peace eternally.

94 Man dwelt here, through his fault, for but a space,[486]  
Since he exchanged sweet sport and honest mirth  
For tears and toiling through a fault so base.

97 From vapors of the stream and of the earth (Which follow heat as far, then,  
as they may)  
Disturbances below may take their birth.[\[487\]](#)

100 That they not war on man in any way, This close to Heaven rose the  
mountain stair,  
Made free above its gate from such a fray.

103 And now, since in a circuit all the air Spins with the *Primum Mobile* around,  
If nothing breaks the circle anywhere,[\[488\]](#)

106 That movement comes to strike upon this mound, Which in the living air is  
wholly free,  
And makes the woods, since they are dense, resound.

109 The smitten plants have such a potency That they impregnate with their  
force that breeze,  
Which in its circling spreads it thoroughly.

112 The rest of earth, if fit for things like these[\[489\]](#)  
In land and sky, will then conceive and bear,  
From diverse powers, diverse plants and trees.

115 The marvel should not seem to you so rare, This being heard, if plants on  
earth below,  
Without a seed that's seen, have rooted there.

118 And right where you are standing, you should know, Each kind of seed has  
filled the holy plain,  
In which the fruits, not plucked beyond, all grow.

121 The water seen springs not from any vein That vapor, when condensed by  
cold, restores,  
Like streams whose forces know both loss and gain,

124 But from a sure and constant fountain pours, Which by God's will receives  
all that it needs  
To pour forth freely on its double shores

To pour forth freely on its double shores.

127 So, downwards through this part its virtue leads To put remembrance of all  
sin aside;  
On that part, though, it calls to mind good deeds.

130 Called Lethe here, Eunoë on that side,[\[490\]](#)  
This water will not do its work anew  
If on this side and that it is not tried.

133 It tastes far sweeter than all others do; Though I might fully satisfy your  
thirst  
If I disclose no more of this to you,

136 I'll give, as grace, a corollary first; Nor do I think my speech will be less  
dear  
If greater space than promised is traversed.

139 The poets who in olden times appear To sing the happy state and Age of  
Gold  
Perhaps dreamt on Parnassus of this tier.[\[491\]](#)

142 Here mankind's root was innocent of old,[\[492\]](#)  
Here's lasting spring, here's every fruit that grows;  
This nectar's that of which all bards have told."

145 I turned around completely unto those Dear Poets, and I saw them give a  
smile  
When they had heard the final words she chose.

148 My eyes then turned to that fair maid a while.