

## CANTO TWENTY-THIRD.

### ARGUMENT :

Here the beams of a Sun, Christ, shone with a splendor which Dante's sight could not endure, and the heavenly vision was lifted higher up, to spare his overburdened powers. But the smile of Beatrice returned, Dante's powers now being prepared for its splendors. Beatrice points out to him the star representing the Blessed Virgin and the torch representing Gabriel; and melodies are heard of exquisite sweetness; and these splendors and melodies are declared by Dante to be a triumph introducing the appearance of Saint Peter.

The Heaven of the Fixed Stars.

PERSONS SPEAKING : The triumphal hosts in song. Dante. Beatrice.

PERSONS APPEARING : Rays descending from Christ. A star representing the Blessed Virgin. A torch representing Gabriel. The Apostles.

EVEN as a bird, the leaves beloved among,  
Quiet upon the nest her sweet brood holds,  
Throughout the night which, darkling, us enfolds,  
Who, that the grateful eye, the twittering tongue,  
May greet her once again, and that, employed  
In cares for them, she food may find enjoyed,  
Leaps to a spray, prevenient of the time,  
And there, above their couch, with ardent heart,  
Strains her fond gaze to watch dawn's gates  
apart :

Even thus my Lady standing was, sublime 10  
    Upon her shining light from Southern skies,  
    Erect and vigilant she, with love-lit eyes ;  
So that, beholding her with wondering still,  
    Such I became as one who loving yearns,  
    And in whom hope appeases that him burns.  
But brief the space was When to When did fill,  
    And not long waited I to see once more  
    Heaven more resplendent grow in roof and floor.

And Beatrice exclaimed : " The march behold 19  
    Of Christ's triumphal hosts, and all the grain  
    Thy harvests in these rolling lustres gain ! "  
It seemed to me that o'er her face flame rolled,  
    And shone so full of ecstasy pure her eyes  
    That, by them tried, my power of painting dies.  
As in the calm, full moon, when Trivia smiles  
    Among the nymphs eternal who the sky  
    With splendor tint through all its depths on high,

I saw above the lamps of myriad miles 28  
    A Sun that o'er them all a radiance shed  
    As from our own o'er all our scenes are sped ;  
And through the living light shone forth so clear  
    The lustrous substance, that bore not my might  
    Its power intense, but failed the o'erwearied  
    sight.  
" O Beatrice, thou my gentle Guide and dear ! "  
    Then she : " The Splendor that now o'er thee  
    trails  
    A Virtue is 'gainst which no shield avails.

“ The Wisdom and the Power are here that  
heaven 37

And earth betwixt the thoroughfares oped,  
wherefor

So long yearned men awaiting to adore.”

As fire from out a cloud unlocked is given

Forth to the earth, because it doth dilate,

And that the cloud no longer holds its freight,

So did my mind, on aliments such fed large,

Forth issue from itself, and what it then

Became, in wandering, is beyond my ken.

“ Thine eyes now open, my bewildered charge ; 46  
Things glorious thou hast seen which them  
prepare

The lesser splendors of my smile to bear.”

I was as one when a forgotten dream

His mind recovers partially, but, then, shrinks

The fairy fragment, nor reveals its links,

When I this greeting heard ; nor shall the stream

Of grateful feelings cease which mine it made,

Nor happiness such from memory's records fade.

If should be turned to praises every tongue 55

That Polyhymnia and her sisters nursed

With milk delicious deigned to poets' thirst,

Not of the truth a thousandth part were sung

Of homage due that sacred smile, nor hue

Of peerless beauty her expression knew.

And thus, in figuring Paradise, forth must leap

The sacred Poem o'er the chasm wide

Before its path, or own its powers defied ;

And whoso such a theme upheld would keep, 64  
Should not a mortal shoulder blame if weight  
Like this should tremblings bring howe'er elate ;  
No lakelet is it for a tiny boat,  
This mere my daring prow doth dash aside ;  
Here must the pilot's every nerve be tried.  
"Why on my face do thus thy fancies float,  
That thou no heed hast for the garden fair  
Which, 'neath Christ's rays, doth such rare blos-  
somings bear ?

"The Rose is there, wherein the Word Divine 73  
Incarnate was ; and there the lilies bloom  
Which showed the Good Way by their sweet  
perfume."

Thus Beatrice blest ; and I, whose guidance mine  
Hers ever was, myself began to arouse  
To bear the battle of the feeble brows.  
As have ere now mine eyes, in shadow held,  
Seen through a fractured cloud the sun's pure ray  
On ray in jubilance o'er a meadow play,

So, seeing not the source my being spelled, 82  
I hosts of trooping splendors saw, which light,  
Sent from above, made more divinely bright.  
O thou kind Power, whose light so on them broke,  
Thou didst thyself exalt more scope to give  
To eyes of mine that could not otherwise live !  
The name of that fair Flower I e'er invoke  
Morning and evening, gave my soul in thrall  
To gaze upon the greater fire of all.

And when in both mine eyes the living flame      91  
Of that high Star whose glories there excel  
As did they here, had formed its semblance well,  
Lo! from within the sky a torchlet came,  
And, in its radiant progress circling down,  
Around it formed of fire a beauteous crown.  
Whatever melody sounds on earth most sweet,  
And most entrances there the listening soul,  
Might seem a torn cloud through which thunders  
roll,

Compared unto the sounds those heavens did  
greet      100  
When crowned that lyre the sapphire's beauty, far  
In jewell'd skies denoting e'er that Star :  
"I Love Angelic am, whose circling glow  
The joy attends which breathes from out the womb  
That gave to our Desire its inn and room ;  
And circle shall I, Lady of Heaven, so,  
While still thy Son thou followest, and increased  
By thy blest presence is this heavenly feast."

Thus did the circling melody find its close ;      109  
And, as it ended, all the lights beside  
The strain took up and MARY'S name spread  
wide.

The robe that o'er space universal flows,  
And fervid more than all is with the life  
The immediate breath of God there maketh rife,  
O'er us its inner border spread so far  
That where I was the semblance of it yet  
Had not with its clear folds my vision met,

Therefore did not mine eyes possess the power 118  
Of following that crowned Star, whose unstained  
flame

Those heights empyrean sought from whence it  
came.

And as a babe, its lips with milk yet wet,  
Towards its mother holds its arms, to bless  
Its source of joy with one more fond caress,  
So with its summit flaming as a jet,  
Did each effulgence sway t'wards Mary, whence  
I learned for her their fondness felt intense.

And then remained they full within my view, 127  
In tones "Regina Cœli" singing, ne'er  
From my delighted memory forth to fare.

O what abundant heavenly harvests knew  
Those reapers glorious, and those following them  
Will know, enriched for wheat with gem on gem!  
For so converted they the treasure find  
Which sown in tears was under Babylon's walls  
Whereof their gold made glare the lordly halls.

And, 'neath God's sway, and Mary's auspices  
kind, 136  
And frondage, Old and New, the fruit, the bloom,  
There he his mighty triumph holds to whom  
The keys of such a glory were assigned.

#### NOTES TO THE TWENTY-THIRD CANTO.

29. "*A Sun that o'er them all.*" Dante adopts the Ptolemaic idea that all the stars of heaven derive their light from our sun.