

CANTO XXIII

Like a mother bird awaiting dawn to go in search of food for her nestlings, Beatrice peers intently at the highest point of the sky, expecting something to appear. Her anticipation both whets Dante's appetite and satisfies it in hope. Soon the heavens brighten, and Beatrice cries out at the approach of the Church Triumphant led by the victorious Christ, her face so indescribably radiant that the Poet must pass over it in silence (1–24). Then, as the moon stands amid the multitude of stars, Christ, the Sun, shows himself among the flaming lights of the blessed with such a splendor that the Pilgrim cannot bear the sight, though, like lightning bursting forth from a cloud, he finds himself transported in rapturous ecstasy (25–45). After the vision of the glorified Christ, Dante discovers the strength to gaze directly upon Beatrice's smile, whose brilliance he can now recollect only as a fleeting dream, and of which the most inspired speech of the poets could not describe a thousandth part, so that he must again forgo a description (46–69). Beatrice, however, directs the Pilgrim's attention to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Apostles, who appear like a rose and lilies in the garden of the saints, basking in the rays of the ascended Christ. Singing a song of transcendent beauty, the Angel Gabriel descends like a torch and circles around Mary, as if to crown her. When he has completed his homage, the Virgin also ascends out of sight towards the Primum Mobile as all the fervent souls stretch the crests of their flames towards her, like suckled children reaching up to their mothers, and intone the *Regina coeli*. Into the midst of these saints, who had stored up treasure for themselves in Heaven while they still lived as exiles on earth, comes St. Peter, who holds the keys to eternal life (70–139).

- ¹ Right by the nest of her sweet fledglings, mid Belovèd leaves, a bird sits
 nestled when
Throughout the nighttime everything is hid,
- ⁴ And, to behold her longed-for ones again And find some food with which to
 feed them now
(For which her heavy toils are pleasing then),
- ⁷ She bides her time upon an open bough And waits for morning's sun with
 love aglow
While looking hard for dawn—that too is how
- ¹⁰ My Lady had been standing there, just so, Turned round to face that realm,
 erect, intent,

Beneath whose skies the sun appears more slow.[\[533\]](#)

13 And to behold suspense and longing blent In her made me like one whose
appetite
Is for yet more but is in hope content.

16 From one “when” to the next the time was slight, I mean of waiting and of
seeing here
The heavens turning bright and yet more bright.

19 “Behold the troops of Christ in triumph near,”
Cried Beatrice, “and at the fruit now gaze
That’s garnered from the circling of each sphere!”[\[534\]](#)

22 It seemed to me her face was all ablaze, And such a joyfulness had filled her
eyes
I have to let it pass without a phrase.

25 As smiling Trivïa at full moon lies[\[535\]](#)
Among eternal nymphs in cloudless nights[\[536\]](#)
Who paint the depths of all the Heaven’s skies,

28 I saw above a thousand of such lights A Sun whose flames had made them
all ignite,[\[537\]](#)
As does our own with the supernal sights.

31 I came to witness through the living light The lucent Substance, which shone
through so clear[\[538\]](#)
My vision could not bear it yet outright.

34 O Beatrice, sweet guide of mine and dear!
“What overcomes you is the strength,” she told
Me then, “against which no defense can steer.

37 The Wisdom and the Power now behold,[\[539\]](#)
Which opened roads mid earth and Heaven’s bands,
For which there was such long desire of old.”

40 As fire breaks from a cloud when it expands[\[540\]](#)
Because it has no room there and, unchecked,
Against its nature falls to earthly lands,[\[541\]](#)

43 So too amid those feasts my intellect Had swelled to burst its bonds in such a
style
What it became it cannot recollect.

46 “With open eyes, see what I am a while, For you have seen such things that
give the kind
Of strength you’ve needed to sustain my smile.”

49 I was like one just waking up to find He’d had a dream but has forgotten it
And strives in vain to bring it back to mind

52 When I had heard this offer, which was fit To have such thanks that it could
never fade
Out of the book in which the past is writ.[\[542\]](#)

55 All tongues Polimnïa and sisters made[\[543\]](#)
Most rich with dulcet sounds milked from their art
Could very well resound to lend me aid

58 In singing her blest smile with all my heart And how her holy face glowed
from that source— It would not reach the truth’s one thousandth part!

61 And so, depicting Paradise will force This consecrated song of mine to make
A leap, like one who finds a blocked-off course.

64 But he who thinks what heavy theme I take, The burden that these mortal
shoulders tote,
Will lay no blame if under it I shake.

67 This is no voyage for a little boat —These seas my daring prow goes
cleaving through— Or helmsmen who would spare themselves afloat.

70 “Why does my visage so enamor you
That you don’t turn to that fair garden’s sod
Which blooms beneath the rays of Christ anew?[\[544\]](#)

73 Here is the Rose in which the Word of God[\[545\]](#)
Was once made flesh; there are the lilies too,[\[546\]](#)
By whose sweet odor righteous paths were trod.”

76 Thus Beatrice; and I, quite prompt to do What she might counsel gave
myself once more
Up to the battle of the feeble view.

79 And as beneath pure sunlight’s rays that pour Through broken clouds my
eyes, bedecked by shade,
Have seen a meadow flowering before,

82 I saw the splendid troops on which there rayed[\[547\]](#)
Such ardent beams but still could not divine
The higher source from which the blaze was made.[\[548\]](#)

85 O you, who so imprint them, Might Benign, You were exalted that a place
might fall
To eyes not strong enough for You, like mine.[\[549\]](#)

88 That fair bloom’s name on which I ever call[\[550\]](#)
Both morn and eve absorbed my mind from far
To gaze upon the greatest flame of all.

91 And when on both my eyes the living star[\[551\]](#)
Was painted in its nature and its might,
Surpassing there, as here, all things that are,[\[552\]](#)

94 Down through the skies there came a torch in flight[\[553\]](#)
That formed a circle, like a crown, with rounds
That girded her and wheeled about her site.

97 Whatever melody most sweetly sounds Down here and draws to it the soul’s
desire
Would seem rent clouds whose thundering resounds

100 When likened to the music of that lyre,[\[554\]](#)

By which this lovely sapphire had been crowned,[\[555\]](#)
A gem within the brightest heaven's choir.[\[556\]](#)

103 "I am angelic love who circle round The lofty joy respiring from the womb,
The hostelry where our Desire was found.[\[557\]](#)

106 I'll circle till, O Heaven's Maid and Bloom, You trail your Son and more
divinely flame
The highest sphere by entering its room."[\[558\]](#)

109 And thus the melody, in circling, came To seal itself; and all the other
gleeds
Resounded with the praise of Mary's name.

112 That regal mantle of each sphere which speeds[\[559\]](#)
Around the world, that burning all the more,
And that most quickened in God's breath and deeds,

115 Was far above us at its inner shore, So distant from the place I stood,
indeed,
Its presence had not come yet to the fore.

118 My eyes had not the power they would need To follow, as the Flame just
crowned arose,[\[560\]](#)
Which mounted upwards close behind her Seed.[\[561\]](#)

121 As, when its milk is had, a babe which throws Its arms up to its mother has
expressed
In outward form an inward love that glows,

124 Each of those splendid souls stretched up its crest So that the deep affection
they requite
To Mary was, for me, made manifest.

127 And they, remaining in my field of sight, Entoned *Regina coeli*, sweetly,
so[\[562\]](#)
I never have been left by that delight.

130 How great is the abundant overflow Heaped up in those rich coffers and
obtained

By those who sowed good seed when down below!

133 They live here and rejoice in treasure gained By having wept their tears in
exile done

In Babylon, where gold had been disdained.[\[563\]](#)

136 Here triumphs under the exalted Son Of God and Mary, in his victory,
Along with councils new and old, that one[\[564\]](#)

139 Who to so great a glory holds the key.[\[565\]](#)