

Project Gutenberg's The Divine Comedy, Complete, by Dante Alighieri

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The Vision of Paradise, Purgatory and Hell

Author: Dante Alighieri

Illustrator: Gustave Dore

Translator: Rev. H. F. Cary

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THE DIVINE COMEDY

THE VISION

OF

HELL, PURGATORY, AND PARADISE

BY

DANTE ALIGHIERI

PARADISE

Complete

TRANSLATED BY

THE REV. H. F. CARY, M.A.

PARADISE

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CANTO I

His glory, by whose might all things are mov'd,
Pierces the universe, and in one part
Sheds more resplendence, elsewhere less. In heav'n,
That largeliest of his light partakes, was I,
Witness of things, which to relate again
Surpasseth power of him who comes from thence;
For that, so near approaching its desire
Our intellect is to such depth absorb'd,
That memory cannot follow. Nathless all,
That in my thoughts I of that sacred realm
Could store, shall now be matter of my song.

Benign Apollo! this last labour aid,

And make me such a vessel of thy worth,
As thy own laurel claims of me belov'd.
Thus far hath one of steep Parnassus' brows
Suffic'd me; henceforth there is need of both
For my remaining enterprise Do thou
Enter into my bosom, and there breathe
So, as when Marsyas by thy hand was dragg'd
Forth from his limbs unsheath'd. O power divine!
If thou to me of shine impart so much,
That of that happy realm the shadow'd form
Trac'd in my thoughts I may set forth to view,
Thou shalt behold me of thy favour'd tree
Come to the foot, and crown myself with leaves;
For to that honour thou, and my high theme
Will fit me. If but seldom, mighty Sire!
To grace his triumph gathers thence a wreath
Caesar or bard (more shame for human wills
Deprav'd) joy to the Delphic god must spring
From the Pierian foliage, when one breast
Is with such thirst inspir'd. From a small spark
Great flame hath risen: after me perchance
Others with better voice may pray, and gain
From the Cirrhaean city answer kind.

Through diver passages, the world's bright lamp
Rises to mortals, but through that which joins
Four circles with the threefold cross, in best
Course, and in happiest constellation set
He comes, and to the worldly wax best gives
Its temper and impression. Morning there,
Here eve was by almost such passage made;
And whiteness had o'erspread that hemisphere,
Blackness the other part; when to the left
I saw Beatrice turn'd, and on the sun
Gazing, as never eagle fix'd his ken.
As from the first a second beam is wont
To issue, and reflected upwards rise,
E'en as a pilgrim bent on his return,
So of her act, that through the eyesight pass'd
Into my fancy, mine was form'd; and straight,
Beyond our mortal wont, I fix'd mine eyes
Upon the sun. Much is allowed us there,
That here exceeds our pow'r; thanks to the place
Made for the dwelling of the human kind

I suffer'd it not long, and yet so long
That I beheld it bick'ring sparks around,
As iron that comes boiling from the fire.
And suddenly upon the day appear'd
A day new-ris'n, as he, who hath the power,
Had with another sun bedeck'd the sky.

Her eyes fast fix'd on the eternal wheels,
Beatrice stood unmov'd; and I with ken
Fix'd upon her, from upward gaze remov'd
At her aspect, such inwardly became
As Glaucus, when he tasted of the herb,
That made him peer among the ocean gods;
Words may not tell of that transhuman change:
And therefore let the example serve, though weak,
For those whom grace hath better proof in store

If I were only what thou didst create,
Then newly, Love! by whom the heav'n is rul'd,
Thou know'st, who by thy light didst bear me up.
Whenas the wheel which thou dost ever guide,
Desired Spirit! with its harmony
Temper'd of thee and measur'd, charm'd mine ear,
Then seem'd to me so much of heav'n to blaze
With the sun's flame, that rain or flood ne'er made
A lake so broad. The newness of the sound,
And that great light, inflam'd me with desire,
Keener than e'er was felt, to know their cause.

Whence she who saw me, clearly as myself,
To calm my troubled mind, before I ask'd,
Open'd her lips, and gracious thus began:
"With false imagination thou thyself
Mak'st dull, so that thou seest not the thing,
Which thou hadst seen, had that been shaken off.
Thou art not on the earth as thou believ'st;
For light'ning scap'd from its own proper place
Ne'er ran, as thou hast hither now return'd."

Although divested of my first-rais'd doubt,
By those brief words, accompanied with smiles,
Yet in new doubt was I entangled more,
And said: "Already satisfied, I rest
From admiration deep, but now admire
How I above those lighter bodies rise."

Whence, after utt'rance of a piteous sigh,
She tow'rds me bent her eyes, with such a look,
As on her frenzied child a mother casts;
Then thus began: "Among themselves all things
Have order; and from hence the form, which makes
The universe resemble God. In this
The higher creatures see the printed steps
Of that eternal worth, which is the end
Whither the line is drawn. All natures lean,
In this their order, diversely, some more,
Some less approaching to their primal source.
Thus they to different havens are mov'd on
Through the vast sea of being, and each one
With instinct giv'n, that bears it in its course;
This to the lunar sphere directs the fire,
This prompts the hearts of mortal animals,
This the brute earth together knits, and binds.
Nor only creatures, void of intellect,
Are aim'd at by this bow; but even those,
That have intelligence and love, are pierc'd.
That Providence, who so well orders all,
With her own light makes ever calm the heaven,
In which the substance, that hath greatest speed,
Is turn'd: and thither now, as to our seat
Predestin'd, we are carried by the force
Of that strong cord, that never looses dart,
But at fair aim and glad. Yet is it true,
That as ofttimes but ill accords the form
To the design of art, through sluggishness
Of unreplying matter, so this course
Is sometimes quitted by the creature, who

Hath power, directed thus, to bend elsewhere;
As from a cloud the fire is seen to fall,
From its original impulse warp'd, to earth,
By vicious fondness. Thou no more admire
Thy soaring, (if I rightly deem,) than lapse
Of torrent downwards from a mountain's height.
There would in thee for wonder be more cause,
If, free of hind'rance, thou hadst fix'd thyself
Below, like fire unmoving on the earth."

So said, she turn'd toward the heav'n her face.

CANTO II

All ye, who in small bark have following sail'd,
Eager to listen, on the advent'rous track
Of my proud keel, that singing cuts its way,
Backward return with speed, and your own shores
Revisit, nor put out to open sea,
Where losing me, perchance ye may remain
Bewilder'd in deep maze. The way I pass
Ne'er yet was run: Minerva breathes the gale,
Apollo guides me, and another Nine
To my rapt sight the arctic beams reveal.
Ye other few, who have outstretch'd the neck.
Timely for food of angels, on which here
They live, yet never know satiety,
Through the deep brine ye fearless may put out
Your vessel, marking, well the furrow broad
Before you in the wave, that on both sides
Equal returns. Those, glorious, who pass'd o'er
To Colchos, wonder'd not as ye will do,
When they saw Jason following the plough.

The increate perpetual thirst, that draws
Toward the realm of God's own form, bore us
Swift almost as the heaven ye behold.

Beatrice upward gaz'd, and I on her,
And in such space as on the notch a dart
Is plac'd, then loosen'd flies, I saw myself
Arriv'd, where wond'rous thing engag'd my sight.
Whence she, to whom no work of mine was hid,
Turning to me, with aspect glad as fair,
Bespake me: "Gratefully direct thy mind
To God, through whom to this first star we come."

Me seem'd as if a cloud had cover'd us,
Translucent, solid, firm, and polish'd bright,
Like adamant, which the sun's beam had smit
Within itself the ever-during pearl
Receiv'd us, as the wave a ray of light
Receives, and rests unbroken. If I then
Was of corporeal frame, and it transcend
Our weaker thought, how one dimension thus
Another could endure, which needs must be
If body enter body, how much more
Must the desire inflame us to behold

That essence, which discovers by what means
God and our nature join'd! There will be seen
That which we hold through faith, not shown by proof,
But in itself intelligibly plain,
E'en as the truth that man at first believes.

I answered: "Lady! I with thoughts devout,
Such as I best can frame, give thanks to Him,
Who hath remov'd me from the mortal world.
But tell, I pray thee, whence the gloomy spots
Upon this body, which below on earth
Give rise to talk of Cain in fabling quaint?"

She somewhat smil'd, then spake: "If mortals err
In their opinion, when the key of sense
Unlocks not, surely wonder's weapon keen
Ought not to pierce thee; since thou find'st, the wings
Of reason to pursue the senses' flight
Are short. But what thy own thought is, declare."

Then I: "What various here above appears,
Is caus'd, I deem, by bodies dense or rare."

She then resum'd: "Thou certainly wilt see
In falsehood thy belief o'erwhelm'd, if well
Thou listen to the arguments, which I
Shall bring to face it. The eighth sphere displays
Numberless lights, the which in kind and size
May be remark'd of different aspects;
If rare or dense of that were cause alone,
One single virtue then would be in all,
Alike distributed, or more, or less.
Different virtues needs must be the fruits
Of formal principles, and these, save one,
Will by thy reasoning be destroy'd. Beside,
If rarity were of that dusk the cause,
Which thou inquirest, either in some part
That planet must throughout be void, nor fed
With its own matter; or, as bodies share
Their fat and leanness, in like manner this
Must in its volume change the leaves. The first,
If it were true, had through the sun's eclipse
Been manifested, by transparency
Of light, as through aught rare beside effus'd.
But this is not. Therefore remains to see
The other cause: and if the other fall,
Erroneous so must prove what seem'd to thee.
If not from side to side this rarity
Pass through, there needs must be a limit, whence
Its contrary no further lets it pass.
And hence the beam, that from without proceeds,
Must be pour'd back, as colour comes, through glass
Reflected, which behind it lead conceals.
Now wilt thou say, that there of murkier hue
Than in the other part the ray is shown,
By being thence refracted farther back.
From this perplexity will free thee soon
Experience, if thereof thou trial make,
The fountain whence your arts derive their streame.
Three mirrors shalt thou take, and two remove
From thee alike, and more remote the third.

Betwixt the former pair, shall meet thine eyes;
Then turn'd toward them, cause behind thy back
A light to stand, that on the three shall shine,
And thus reflected come to thee from all.
Though that beheld most distant do not stretch
A space so ample, yet in brightness thou
Will own it equaling the rest. But now,
As under snow the ground, if the warm ray
Smites it, remains dismantled of the hue
And cold, that cover'd it before, so thee,
Dismantled in thy mind, I will inform
With light so lively, that the tremulous beam
Shall quiver where it falls. Within the heaven,
Where peace divine inhabits, circles round
A body, in whose virtue dies the being
Of all that it contains. The following heaven,
That hath so many lights, this being divides,
Through different essences, from it distinct,
And yet contain'd within it. The other orbs
Their separate distinctions variously
Dispose, for their own seed and produce apt.
Thus do these organs of the world proceed,
As thou beholdest now, from step to step,
Their influences from above deriving,
And thence transmitting downwards. Mark me well,
How through this passage to the truth I ford,
The truth thou lov'st, that thou henceforth alone,
May'st know to keep the shallows, safe, untold.

"The virtue and motion of the sacred orbs,
As mallet by the workman's hand, must needs
By blessed movers be inspir'd. This heaven,
Made beauteous by so many luminaries,
From the deep spirit, that moves its circling sphere,
Its image takes an impress as a seal:
And as the soul, that dwells within your dust,
Through members different, yet together form'd,
In different pow'rs resolves itself; e'en so
The intellectual efficacy unfolds
Its goodness multiplied throughout the stars;
On its own unity revolving still.
Different virtue compact different
Makes with the precious body it enlivens,
With which it knits, as life in you is knit.
From its original nature full of joy,
The virtue mingled through the body shines,
As joy through pupil of the living eye.
From hence proceeds, that which from light to light
Seems different, and not from dense or rare.
This is the formal cause, that generates
Proportion'd to its power, the dusk or clear."

CANTO III

That sun, which erst with love my bosom warm'd
Had of fair truth unveil'd the sweet aspect,
By proof of right, and of the false reproof;
And I, to own myself convinc'd and free

Of doubt, as much as needed, rais'd my head
Erect for speech. But soon a sight appear'd,
Which, so intent to mark it, held me fix'd,
That of confession I no longer thought.

As through translucent and smooth glass, or wave
Clear and unmov'd, and flowing not so deep
As that its bed is dark, the shape returns
So faint of our impictur'd lineaments,
That on white forehead set a pearl as strong
Comes to the eye: such saw I many a face,
All stretch'd to speak, from whence I straight conceiv'd
Delusion opposite to that, which rais'd
Between the man and fountain, amorous flame.

Sudden, as I perceiv'd them, deeming these
Reflected semblances to see of whom
They were, I turn'd mine eyes, and nothing saw;
Then turn'd them back, directed on the light
Of my sweet guide, who smiling shot forth beams
From her celestial eyes. "Wonder not thou,"
She cry'd, "at this my smiling, when I see
Thy childish judgment; since not yet on truth
It rests the foot, but, as it still is wont,
Makes thee fall back in unsound vacancy.
True substances are these, which thou behold'st,
Hither through failure of their vow exil'd.
But speak thou with them; listen, and believe,
That the true light, which fills them with desire,
Permits not from its beams their feet to stray."

Straight to the shadow which for converse seem'd
Most earnest, I addressed me, and began,
As one by over-eagerness perplex'd:
"O spirit, born for joy! who in the rays
Of life eternal, of that sweetness know'st
The flavour, which, not tasted, passes far
All apprehension, me it well would please,
If thou wouldst tell me of thy name, and this
Your station here." Whence she, with kindness prompt,
And eyes glist'ning with smiles: "Our charity,
To any wish by justice introduc'd,
Bars not the door, no more than she above,
Who would have all her court be like herself.
I was a virgin sister in the earth;
And if thy mind observe me well, this form,
With such addition grac'd of loveliness,
Will not conceal me long, but thou wilt know
Piccarda, in the tardiest sphere thus plac'd,
Here 'mid these other blessed also blest.
Our hearts, whose high affections burn alone
With pleasure, from the Holy Spirit conceiv'd,
Admitted to his order dwell in joy.
And this condition, which appears so low,
Is for this cause assign'd us, that our vows
Were in some part neglected and made void."

Whence I to her replied: "Something divine
Beams in your countenance, wond'rous fair,
From former knowledge quite transmuting you.
Therefore to recollect was I so slow.

But what thou sayst hath to my memory
Given now such aid, that to retrace your forms
Is easier. Yet inform me, ye, who here
Are happy, long ye for a higher place
More to behold, and more in love to dwell?"

She with those other spirits gently smil'd,
Then answer'd with such gladness, that she seem'd
With love's first flame to glow: "Brother! our will
Is in composure settled by the power
Of charity, who makes us will alone
What we possess, and nought beyond desire;
If we should wish to be exalted more,
Then must our wishes jar with the high will
Of him, who sets us here, which in these orbs
Thou wilt confess not possible, if here
To be in charity must needs befall,
And if her nature well thou contemplate.
Rather it is inherent in this state
Of blessedness, to keep ourselves within
The divine will, by which our wills with his
Are one. So that as we from step to step
Are plac'd throughout this kingdom, pleases all,
E'en as our King, who in us plants his will;
And in his will is our tranquillity;
It is the mighty ocean, whither tends
Whatever it creates and nature makes."

Then saw I clearly how each spot in heav'n
Is Paradise, though with like gracious dew
The supreme virtue show'r not over all.

But as it chanced, if one sort of food
Hath satiated, and of another still
The appetite remains, that this is ask'd,
And thanks for that return'd; e'en so did I
In word and motion, bent from her to learn
What web it was, through which she had not drawn
The shuttle to its point. She thus began:
"Exalted worth and perfectness of life
The Lady higher up enshrine in heaven,
By whose pure laws upon your nether earth
The robe and veil they wear, to that intent,
That e'en till death they may keep watch or sleep
With their great bridegroom, who accepts each vow,
Which to his gracious pleasure love conforms.
from the world, to follow her, when young
Escap'd; and, in her vesture mantling me,
Made promise of the way her sect enjoins.
Thereafter men, for ill than good more apt,
Forth snatch'd me from the pleasant cloister's pale.
God knows how after that my life was fram'd.
This other splendid shape, which thou beholdst
At my right side, burning with all the light
Of this our orb, what of myself I tell
May to herself apply. From her, like me
A sister, with like violence were torn
The saintly folds, that shaded her fair brows.
E'en when she to the world again was brought
In spite of her own will and better wont,
Yet not for that the bosom's inward veil

Did she renounce. This is the luminary
Of mighty Constance, who from that loud blast,
Which blew the second over Suabia's realm,
That power produc'd, which was the third and last."

She ceas'd from further talk, and then began
"Ave Maria" singing, and with that song
Vanish'd, as heavy substance through deep wave.

Mine eye, that far as it was capable,
Pursued her, when in dimness she was lost,
Turn'd to the mark where greater want impell'd,
And bent on Beatrice all its gaze.
But she as light'ning beam'd upon my looks:
So that the sight sustain'd it not at first.
Whence I to question her became less prompt.

CANTO IV

Between two kinds of food, both equally
Remote and tempting, first a man might die
Of hunger, ere he one could freely choose.
E'en so would stand a lamb between the maw
Of two fierce wolves, in dread of both alike:
E'en so between two deer a dog would stand,
Wherefore, if I was silent, fault nor praise
I to myself impute, by equal doubts
Held in suspense, since of necessity
It happen'd. Silent was I, yet desire
Was painted in my looks; and thus I spake
My wish more earnestly than language could.

As Daniel, when the haughty king he freed
From ire, that spurr'd him on to deeds unjust
And violent; so look'd Beatrice then.

"Well I discern," she thus her words address'd,
"How contrary desires each way constrain thee,
So that thy anxious thought is in itself
Bound up and stifled, nor breathes freely forth.
Thou arguest; if the good intent remain;
What reason that another's violence
Should stint the measure of my fair desert?

"Cause too thou findest for doubt, in that it seems,
That spirits to the stars, as Plato deem'd,
Return. These are the questions which thy will
Urge equally; and therefore I the first
Of that will treat which hath the more of gall.
Of seraphim he who is most ensky'd,
Moses and Samuel, and either John,
Choose which thou wilt, nor even Mary's self,
Have not in any other heav'n their seats,
Than have those spirits which so late thou saw'st;
Nor more or fewer years exist; but all
Make the first circle beauteous, diversely
Partaking of sweet life, as more or less
Afflation of eternal bliss pervades them.