

PARADISE



TRANSLATED BY
J.G. NICHOLS

DANTE

ALIGHIERI

The Divine Comedy

Paradise

Dante Alighieri

Translated by J.G. Nichols



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Paradise

BELIEVERS IN CHRIST AFTER HIS INCARNATION

THE CELESTIAL ROSE

EMPYREAN

IX CRYSTALLINE HEAVEN (PRIMUM MOBILE)
HEAVEN OF FIXED STARS (SPIRITS TRIUMPHANT)
OF SATURN (CONTEMPORARY)

IX CRISTO (SPIRITS OF FIXED STARS (SPIRITS TRIUMPHANT))
VIII HEAVEN OF SATURN (CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITS)
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VII HEAVEN OF JUPITER (SPIRITS OF TRIUMPHANT)

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EARTHLY PARADISE

PURGATORY

HELL

FIRE

EARTHLY PARADISE

PURGATORY

FIRE

FIRE

HEMISPHERE OF WATER

INFERNO

HEMISPHERE OF LAND

AIR

AIR

JERUSALEM

ANGELS

ARCHANGELS

PRINCIPLES

POWERS
VIDTLEC

VIRTUES
DOMINIONS

THRONES

CHERUBIM

SERAPHIM

Illustration of Dante's Paradise

CANTO I

At the end of *Purgatory* Dante was standing with Beatrice in the Earthly Paradise, “prepared to rise up to the stars” (xxxiii, 145). We are now to experience that ascent with him. According to the Ptolemaic model of the universe, which Dante and his contemporaries accepted, nine hollow and transparent concentric heavens or spheres are revolving, at differing rates, around the earth, which is the physical centre of the universe. Within each of the seven spheres nearest the earth is a shining body which gives the sphere its name: moving outwards from the earth, these are the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Beyond them is the sphere of the fixed stars, and beyond that is the Primum Mobile, whose movement causes the other spheres to move. Finally there is the Empyrean, pure light, the abode of God, Who sets everything in motion. The souls of the blessed are, of course, in the Empyrean, but Dante speaks of meeting them, or rather their semblances, on the various planets.

Dante cannot fully recall his ascent to Heaven. To describe it as best he can, he invokes not simply the Muses, as he had in the first two books of *The Divine Comedy*, but Apollo, the god of poetry himself. Dante hopes that his efforts will win him the poet’s crown of laurel.

Beatrice, who has taken Virgil’s place as Dante’s guide, is looking directly into the sun. When Dante fixes his eyes on her, the light of the sun grows more intense, and he is changed in a way that is indescribable. Beatrice explains that he is no longer on earth, but moving towards the Empyrean. This is the natural tendency of human beings – to desire to be with God – but it is often thwarted because we do have the power to turn away from God. Dante’s ascent is, in his now sin-free state, as natural as a stream running downhill. Then Beatrice turns her eyes from him to gaze once more on Heaven.

La gloria di colui che tutto move
per l'universo penetra, e risplende
in una parte più e meno altrove.
Nel ciel che più della sua luce prende
fu' io, e vidi cose che ridire
né sa né può chi di là su discende;
perché appressando sé al suo disire,
nostro intelletto si profonda tanto
che dietro la memoria non può ire.
Veramente quant'io del regno santo 10
nella mia mente potei far tesoro,
sarà ora materia del mio canto.
O buono Appollo, all'ultimo lavoro
fammi del tuo valor sì fatto vaso,
come dimandi a dar l'amato alloro.
Infino a qui l'un giogo di Parnaso
assai mi fu, ma or con amendue
m'è uopo intrar nell'aringo rimaso.
Entra nel petto mio, e spira tue 20
sì come quando Marsia traesti
della vagina delle membra sue.
O divina virtù, se mi ti presti
tanto che l'ombra del beato regno
segnata nel mio capo io manifesti,
vedra'mi al piè del tuo diletto legno
venire, e coronarmi delle foglie
che la materia e tu mi farai degno.
Sì rade volte, padre, se ne coglie
per trionfare o cesare o poeta,
colpa e vergogna dell'umane voglie, 30
che parturir letizia in sulla lieta
delfica deità dovria la fronda

His glory, through Whom everything that is
 Is moving, fills the universe, resplendent
 In one part more and in another less.
 Now in that heaven which most receives His light¹
 I was, with things nobody could recall,
 Or can describe, who comes down from that height,
 Because, as it draws near to its desire,
 The mind sinks into such profundity
 That memory cannot pursue it there.
 And yet, despite such losses, everything 10
 My mind did treasure up from that blessed realm
 Shall now become the matter of my song.
 O good Apollo, for this crowning task
 Make me just such a vessel of your worth
 As you, when granting your loved laurel, ask.²
 One of Parnassus' peaks has been enough
 Up to this point, but in this ultimate
 Arena where I struggle I need both.³
 Enter my breast with your inspiring breath,
 Just as you did when you drew Marsyas 20
 Out of his fleshly limbs as from a sheath.⁴
 Virtue divine, if you vouchsafe to me
 Yourself, till I make manifest the image
 Of the blessed realm lodged in my memory,
 You shall behold me coming to the foot
 Of your loved tree⁵ to crown myself with leaves
 For which the theme and you have made me fit.
 So seldom are they plucked to celebrate
 The triumph of a Caesar or a poet –
 In which the shameful human will's at fault – 30
 That the Peneian frond⁶ must breed delight
 Within the joyful Delphic deity⁷

1 The Empyrean, the highest (or, in relation to the earth, the outermost) heaven, pure light.

2 Dante now has to invoke not merely the Muses, as he did in *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, but the god of poetry himself. On his wish for the laurel crown see *Par.* xxv, 1–12.

3 Mount Parnassus has two peaks, one sacred to the Muses, the other (Cyrrrha) to Apollo himself.

4 The satyr Marsyas challenged Apollo to a singing contest, and when he lost he was punished by being skinned alive.

5 See “your loved laurel” (l. 15 above): the nymph Daphne, pursued by Apollo, was changed into a laurel.

6 Daphne was the daughter of the river-god Peneus.

7 Apollo, whose oracle was at Delphi.

peneia, quando alcun di sé asseta.
 Poca favilla gran fiamma seconda:
 forse di retro a me con miglior voci
 si pregherà perché Cirra risponda.
 Surge ai mortali per diverse foci
 la lucerna del mondo; ma da quella
 che quattro cerchi giugne con tre croci,
 con miglior corso e con migliore stella
 esce congiunta, e la mondana cera
 più a suo modo tempera e suggella.
 Fatto avea di là mane e di qua sera
 tal foce, e quasi tutto era là bianco
 quello emisperio, e l'altra parte nera,
 quando Beatrice in sul sinistro fianco
 vidi rivolta e riguardar nel sole:
 aquila sì non li s'affisse unquanco.^a
 E sì come secondo raggio sòle
 uscir del primo e risalire in suso,
 pur come pelegrin che tornar vole,
 così dell'atto suo, per li occhi infuso
 nell'immagine mia, il mio si fece,
 e fissi li occhi al sole oltre nostr'uso.
 Molto è licito là che qui non lece
 alle nostre virtù, mercé del loco
 fatto per proprio dell'umana spece.
 Io nol sofferarsi molto, né sì poco
 ch'io nol vedessi sfavillar dintorno,
 com' ferro che bogliente esce del foco;
 e di sùbito parve giorno a giorno
 essere aggiunto, come quei che puote

a A Latinism for "*mai*" (from the Latin "*unquam*").

When he sees anybody thirst for it.
 A spark can be the prelude to a fire:
 And so some better voices after mine
 May find that Cyrrha⁸ answers to their prayer.
 For mortal men the world's great lamp arises
 At various points, but from its outlet, where
 Four circles are united with three crosses,
 It issues on a better course and joined 40
 To better stars, and it can mould and stamp
 The worldly wax most after its own kind.⁹
 It had brought morning yonder,¹⁰ evening here,¹¹
 When rising at that point, till almost all
 Yonder was white,¹² and black our hemisphere,¹³
 And I saw Beatrice turn to her left side
 And gaze unflinchingly into the sun
 As never any eagle ever could.
 And, as a second ray flies up again,
 Out of the first one, like a peregrine 50
 That, having stooped, is eager to return,¹⁴
 Just so her action, piercing through my eyes
 Into my fantasy, caused my reaction:
 I looked into the sun as no one does.
 Much is allowed there which on earth is banned
 To human faculties, because that place¹⁵
 Was formed expressly for all humankind.
 I could not bear the sun for long, but not
 So short a time I failed to see it sparkle
 Like iron emerging from the fire red-hot. 60
 And daylight suddenly seemed added on
 To daylight, as if He Who has the power

8 A metonym for Apollo: see note 1 above.

9 Lines 37–42: the sun appears to rise in different places according to where one is in the world. When the circles of the celestial equator, the ecliptic and the equinoctial colure cross the circle of the horizon at the same spot, the sun (now, at the spring equinox, in Aries) is most favourable to the earth ("worldly wax").

10 In Purgatory.

11 In Italy.

12 The southern hemisphere, believed to be composed entirely of water except for the island of Mount Purgatory.

13 The northern hemisphere.

14 Other commentators interpret Dante's *pellegrin* as meaning "pilgrim" – therefore, like a homesick pilgrim wishing to return.

15 The Earthly Paradise, created for Adam and Eve and their descendants.

avesse il ciel d'un altro sole adorno.
 Beatrice tutta nell'eterni rote
 fissa con li occhi stava; e io in lei
 le luci fissi, di là su remote.
 Nel suo aspetto tal dentro mi fei
 qual si fe' Glauco nel gustar dell'erba
 che 'l fe' consorte in mar delli altri dèi.
 Trasumanar significar per verba^b 70
 non si poria; però l'esempio basti
 a cui esperienza grazia serba.
 S'i' era sol di me quel che creasti
 novellamente, amor che 'l ciel governi,
 tu 'l sai, che col tuo lume mi levasti.
 Quando la rota che tu sempiterni
 desiderato a sé mi fece atteso
 con l'armonia che temperi e discerni,
 parvemi tanto allor del cielo acceso 80
 della fiamma del sol che pioggia o fiume
 lago non fece alcun tanto disteso.
 La novità del suono e 'l grande lume
 di lor cagion m'accesero un disio
 mai non sentito di cotanto acume.
 Ond'ella, che vedea me sì com'io,
 a quietarmi l'animo commosso,
 pria ch'io a dimandar, la bocca aprio,
 e cominciò: "Tu stesso ti fai grosso
 col falso imaginar, sì che non vedi 90
 ciò che vedresti se l'avessi scosso.
 Tu non se' in terra, sì come tu credi;
 ma folgore, fuggendo il proprio sito,
 non corse come tu ch'ad esso riedi."
 S'io fui del primo dubbio disvestito

b Another Latinism: "in words".

Adorned the heavens with another sun.¹⁶
 Beatrice stood with her eyes fixed upon
 The eternal wheels,¹⁷ while I was fixing mine
 On her, once they had shifted from the sun.
 By gazing at her I was changed inside
 As Glaucus changed on tasting of the herb
 Which made of him an oceanic god.¹⁸
 Transhumanition¹⁹ cannot be expressed 70
 In words – so this example must suffice
 For those who will experience it at last.²⁰
 And whether I was nothing then but what
 You fashioned last,²¹ O Ruler of the heavens,
 You know, O Love Who raised me with Your light.
 When the wheeling,²² which You eternalize
 Through its desire for You, drew my attention
 With varied melody You harmonize,²³
 The blazing of the sunlight seemed to make
 The sky so far enflamed no rain or river 80
 Ever resulted in so broad a lake.
 The newness of the sound and the great light
 Kindled in me such longing for their cause
 That I had never known desire like that.
 So she, who saw within me as I do,
 Parted her lips to calm my troubled mind,
 Before I parted mine to ask her to,
 And she began: “You make yourself obtuse
 With false imaginings, and do not see
 What you would see if you could shake them loose. 90
 You’re not on earth, though you suppose you are,
 But lightning, flying from its proper place,
 Flies not so fast as you returning there.”²⁴
 Divested as I was of my first wonder

16 Dante is approaching the sphere of fire (between the earth and the moon).

17 The heavenly spheres.

18 The mythical Greek fisherman Glaucus, noticing that the fish he caught revived on contact with a certain herb, tasted it himself and was transformed into a sea-god.

19 Going beyond human limitations.

20 When they go to heaven.

21 His soul.

22 The turning of the heavenly spheres.

23 The music thought to be caused by the friction between the various spheres revolving at different speeds.

24 To Heaven.

per le sorrisse parolette brevi,
dentro ad un nuovo più fu' inretito,
e dissi: "Già contento requievi
di grande ammirazion; ma ora ammiro
com'io trascenda questi corpi levi."
Ond'ella, appresso d'un pio sospiro, 100
li occhi drizzò ver me con quel sembiante
che madre fa sovra figlio deliro,
e cominciò: "Le cose tutte quante
hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma
che l'universo a Dio fa simigliante.
Qui veggion l'alte creature l'orma
dell'eterno valore, il qual è fine
al quale è fatta la toccata norma.
Nell'ordine ch'io dico sono accline 110
tutte nature, per diverse sorti,
più al principio loro e men vicine;
onde si muovono a diversi porti
per lo gran mar dell'essere, e ciascuna
con istinto a lei dato che là porti.
Questi ne porta il foco inver la luna;
questi ne' cor mortali è permotore;
questi la terra in sé stringe e aduna;
né pur le creature che son fore
d'intelligenza quest'arco saetta,
ma quelle c'hanno intelletto ed amore. 120
La provedenza, che cotanto assetta,
del suo lume fa 'l ciel sempre quieto
nel qual si volge quel c'ha maggior fretta;
e ora lì, come a sito decreto,
cen porta la virtù di quella corda
che ciò che scocca drizza in segno lieto.
Vero è che, come forma non s'accorda
molte fiate all'intenzion dell'arte,
perch'a risponder la materia è sorda,
così da questo corso si diparte 130
talor la creatura, c'ha podere
di piegar, così pinta, in altra parte;
e sì come veder si può cadere

By those few words she said and by her smile,
 I found myself entangled even further,
 And said: "Before you spoke I was contented
 To rest in wonder – now I wonder more
 How these light bodies are by mine transcended."
 Then Beatrice, with a sigh of pity mild, 100
 Turned her eyes onto me and, with that look
 A mother casts on her delirious child,
 Began to speak: "All things there are are made
 Cognate with one another: this it is
 Which makes the universe most like to God.
 Here all the higher creatures show the hand
 Of the Eternal Excellence, the end
 For which the aforesaid order was designed.
 Into this selfsame ordinance are drawn
 All natures in their varying degrees, 110
 Some near, some nearer to their origin;
 And so they sail, each to a different haven,
 Over the ocean of all being, each
 Drawn onward by the instinct it was given.
 This is what draws fire up towards the moon –
 This is the motive force in human creatures –
 This makes the earth compact itself in one:
 Not only those created things which have
 No intellect are driven by this bowstring,
 But those who have intelligence and love.²⁵ 120
 The providence by which all this is made
 Keeps by its light one heaven²⁶ motionless,
 Within which whirls that heaven that has most speed.²⁷
 To that still heaven, as to the place designed,
 We are impelled by virtue of that bowstring
 Which shoots its shafts towards a happy end.
 Now it is true we all too often find
 His finished work belies an artist's purpose,
 When his matter is deaf and won't respond;
 Just so the creature may be seen to stray 130
 From the right path at times, having the power,
 Though urged aright, to go another way
 (As we at times may actually see fire

25 Angels and men.

26 The Empyrean.

27 The Primum Mobile, the outermost and fastest of the revolving spheres.

foco di nube, sì l'impeto primo
l'atterra torto da falso piacere.
Non dei più ammirar, se bene stimo,
lo tuo salir se non come d'un rivo
se d'alto monte scende giuso ad imo.
Maraviglia sarebbe in te se, privo
d'impedimento, giù ti fossi assiso,
com'a terra quiete in foco vivo.”
Quinci rivolse inver lo cielo il viso.

140

Descending from a cloud)²⁸ with the first impulse
Diverted down to earth by false desire.
You should not be amazed, if I judge right,
By your ascending, more than by a river
Which courses down a mountain to its foot.
The miracle would be if you, now clear
Of all impediment,²⁹ had failed to rise, 140
Like immobility in flames of fire.”
Then back to Heaven once more she turned her eyes.

28 The natural tendency of fire (except for lightning) is to rise.

29 Freed from all trace of sin.

CANTO II

Dante warns his readers that, unless they fervently desire to know God, they should stop reading: he is sailing over uncharted waters, and those who follow him may easily be lost.

Dante finds himself, inexplicably, within the moon. He is anxious to know the reason for the moon's dark spots. He suggests that the moon may be made of matter which is partly dense and partly rarefied. Beatrice destroys his argument by pointing out that he is presuming that only one virtue or power is active, whereas in the sphere of the fixed stars, the stars differ not only in magnitude but also in their brightness and influence, and must therefore be informed by differing virtues. Beatrice explains further that the rarefied substance must either go right through the moon or be in layers. In the first case, light would shine right through during solar eclipses – but this does not happen. In the second case, there would have to be some point at which density resulted in the sun's rays being thrown back as from a mirror, although more dimly than from other parts. Beatrice outlines a simple experiment to show how lights at different distances vary in size but not in brightness. So this second possibility is ruled out.

Beatrice explains the true reason for the dark and light spots. All virtue comes from God, and is distributed throughout the various spheres, sending different powers to each (see *Par.* 1, 1–3). There is a different blend in each of the heavenly bodies, hence “the difference from light to light”, and from one part of the moon to another.

This canto fully justifies Dante's initial warning: it is the most difficult in the poem for a modern reader to understand and appreciate. But the physical/metaphysical discussion is not included to satisfy idle curiosity: it shows how everything in existence depends on God and shares in His virtue or power in its own peculiar way.

O voi che siete in piccioletta barca,
desiderosi d'ascoltar, seguiti
dietro al mio legno che cantando varca,
tornate a riveder li vostri liti:
non vi mettete in pelago, ch   forse,
perdendo me, rimarreste smarriti.
L'acqua ch'io prendo gi   mai non si corse;
Minerva spira, e conducemi Apollo,
e nove Muse mi dimostran l'Orse.
Voi altri pochi che drizzaste il collo 10
per tempo al pan delli angeli, del quale
vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo,
metter potete ben per l'alto sale
vostro navigio, servando mio solco
dinanzi all'acqua che ritorna equale.
Que' gloriosi che passaro al Colco
non s'ammiraron come voi farete,
quando Iason vider fatto bifolco.
La concreata e perpetua sete 20
del deiforme regno cen portava
veloci quasi come 'l ciel vedete.
Beatrice in suso, e io in lei guardava;
e forse in tanto in quanto un quadrel posa
e vola e dalla noce si dischiava,
giunto mi vidi ove mirabil cosa
mi torse il viso a s  ; e per   quella
cui non potea mia cura essere ascosa,
volta ver me, s   lieta come bella,
"Drizza la mente in Dio grata," mi disse,
"che n'ha congiunti con la prima stella." 30
Parev'a me che nube ne coprisse
lucida, spessa, solida e pulita,
quasi adamante che lo sol ferisse.
Per entro s   l'eterna margarita

You who have followed in your tiny skiff,
 Eager to listen to the song I sing,
 And sailed behind my ocean-going ship,
 Turn back and seek again your native coast –
 Do not attempt to cross the open water:
 If you lose sight of me, you will be lost.
 No one has ever ventured on this sea:
 Minerva¹ swells my sail, Apollo steers –
 The Muses all point out the Bears² to me.
 But you, you few still hungry for the bread
 Of angels,³ now as in your earliest years,
 Bread which you live on, never surfeited,
 You may commit your vessel to the main,
 Up close within the furrow which I make,
 Ahead of water settling down again.
 Those heroes who reached Colchis did not find
 As much to astonish them as you will see,
 When they saw Jason ploughing up the land.⁴
 The inborn thirst, thirsting perpetually
 For the most godlike realm,⁵ transported us
 At a speed equal to the heaven men see.⁶
 Beatrice was gazing up, and I at her –
 And at the speed at which a crossbow bolt
 Strikes home, let loose and flying through the air,
 I came to where a wonder was revealed
 Which turned my gaze to it. And she from whom
 Nothing I had at heart could be concealed,
 Turned and, joyful as she was beautiful,
 Said to me: “Turn in gratitude to God,
 Who merges us with the first star of all.”⁷
 It seemed to me that we were held within
 A thick cloud, luminous, dense, solid, polished,
 And like a diamond smitten by the sun.
 Into itself this pearl that lasts for ever

1 Goddess of wisdom.

2 The constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, essential for navigation by night.

3 Wisdom.

4 Jason, leader of the Argonauts, who sailed in quest of the Golden Fleece, had to harness two fire-breathing oxen, plough a field with them and sow dragons' teeth, which sprang up as armed men.

5 The Empyrean.

6 The eighth sphere, that of the fixed stars.

7 The moon, nearest planet to the earth.

ne ricevette, com'acqua recepe^a
 raggio di luce permanendo unita.
 S'io era corpo, e qui non si concepe
 com'una dimensione altra patìo,
 ch'esser convien se corpo in corpo repe,
 accender ne dovria più il disio 40
 di veder quella essenza in che si vede
 come nostra natura e Dio s'unìo.
 Lì si vedrà ciò che tenem per fede,
 non dimostrato, ma fia per sé noto
 a guisa del ver primo che l'uom crede.
 Io rispuosi: "Madonna, sì devoto
 com'esser posso più, ringrazio lui
 lo qual dal mortal mondo m'ha remoto.
 Ma ditemi: che son li segni bui
 di questo corpo, che là giuso in terra 50
 fan di Cain favoleggiare altrui?"
 Ella sorrise alquanto, e poi "S'elli erra
 l'oppinion," mi disse, "de' mortali
 dove chiave di senso non diserra,
 certo non ti dovrien punger li strali
 d'ammirazione omai, poi dietro ai sensi
 vedi che la ragione ha corte l'ali.
 Ma dimmi quel che tu da te ne pensi."
 E io: "Ciò che n'appar qua su diverso
 credo che fanno i corpi rari e densi." 60
 Ed ella: "Certo assai vedrai sommerso
 nel falso il creder tuo se bene ascolti
 l'argomentar ch'io li farò avverso.
 La spera ottava vi dimostra molti
 lumi, li quali e nel quale e nel quanto
 notar si posson di diversi volti.
 Se raro e denso ciò facesser tanto,
 una sola virtù sarebbe in tutti,
 più e men distributa e altrettanto.
 Virtù diverse esser convegnon frutti 70
 a "receives".

Accepted us, the way a stretch of water
 Accepts a ray of light and does not shiver.
 If I was flesh – given we cannot guess
 How any substance can endure another,
 Though it must be so, if mass flows into mass –
 Our longing is perforce intensified 40
 To see Him in Whose being we discern
 Our human nature coalesce with God.⁸
 What here we hold by faith shall there⁹ be seen,
 Not demonstrated, but an axiom,
 Self-evidently true and simply known.
 I answered her: “My lady, I am filled
 With true devotion, giving thanks to Him
 Who has removed me from the mortal world.
 But tell me: what are those dark spots upon
 This planet, which down there upon the earth 50
 Start people spinning stories about Cain?”¹⁰
 She smiled, then answered: “If the comprehension
 Of mortals may be baffled over things
 Which cannot be unlocked by sense perception,
 Then certainly you should not feel the dart
 Of wonder now, since even when the senses
 Are all behind it, reason may fall short.
 But say what you yourself have in your mind.”
 I said: “What here appears diverse is caused
 By matter being dense or rarefied.” 60
 She answered: “You will see now how your thought
 Is floundering in error, if you listen
 To my clear reasons as I counter it.
 You know the eighth sphere¹¹ from your world displays
 A host of lights, which in their size and brightness,
 As you observe, show various visages.
 If this were caused by dense and rarefied
 Alone, there’d be one power within them all,
 More, less, or equally distributed.
 Virtues that are diverse must be deployed 70

8 Lines 37–42: the fact that Dante still has his body, and one substance cannot penetrate another and remain unchanged (which appears to have happened with Dante and the moon), must make us all the more eager to see Christ, Who is fully God and man.

9 In Heaven.

10 A popular belief had it that the first murderer was banished by God to the moon, and could be distinguished there in its dark spots.

11 That of the fixed stars.

di principii formali, e quei, for ch'uno,
seguiterieno a tua ragion distrutti.
Ancor, se raro fosse di quel bruno
cagion che tu dimandi, od oltre in parte
fora di sua materia sì digiuno
esto pianeta, o sì come comparte
lo grasso e 'l magro un corpo, così questo
nel suo volume cangerebbe carte.
Se 'l primo fosse, fora manifesto
nell'eclissi del sol per trasparere
lo lume come in altro raro ingesto. 80
Questo non è: però è da vedere
dell'altro; e s'elli avvien ch'io l'altro cassi,
falsificato fia lo tuo parere.
S'elli è che questo raro non trapassi,
esser conviene un termine da onde
lo suo contrario più passar non lassi;
e indi l'altrui raggio si rifonde
così come color torna per vetro
lo qual di retro a sé piombo nasconde. 90
Or dirai tu ch'el si dimostra tetro
ivi lo raggio più che in altre parti,
per esser lì refratto più a retro.
Da questa istanza può deliberarti
esperienza, se già mai la provi,
ch'esser suol fonte ai rivi di vostr'arti.
Tre specchi prenderai; e i due rimovi
da te d'un modo, e l'altro, più rimosso,
tr'ambo li primi li occhi tuoi ritrovi.
Rivolto ad essi, fa' che dopo il dosso 100
ti stea un lume che i tre specchi accenda
e torni a te da tutti ripercosso.
Ben che nel quanto tanto non si stenda
la vista più lontana, li vedrai
come convien ch'igualmente risplenda.

By diverse formal causes, and all these,
 But one, would by your reasoning be destroyed.¹²
 Again, if rareness makes these spots which you
 Speak of, there'd be two possibilities:
 Either the substance¹³ has been skimped right through
 This planet¹⁴ or, as flesh has lean and fat
 In layers, so throughout this planet's volume
 The thick leaves and the thin would alternate.
 Were the first true, that would be obvious
 In the eclipses of the sun, since light 80
 Shines right through matter that is tenuous.
 Not so: therefore what's left to be disputed
 Now is the second case,¹⁵ which if I shatter,
 Your whole hypothesis remains confuted.
 If your thin substance does not run throughout
 The moon, there has to be a point at which
 Density gives no passage to the light;
 And from that point the sun's rays would not pass,
 But be thrown back again as coloured objects
 Are thrown, when it has lead behind, by glass. 90
 Now you will say such rays will show more dark
 Than rays reflected from the other parts,
 Since they're reflections sent from farther back.
 This further argument be can ruled out,
 If you are willing, by experiment –
 The root of every branch of human art.
 So take three mirrors, set the first two down
 At the same distance, and the third one farther,
 Where it will strike your eyes from in between.
 Now face them, having fixed a light to blaze 100
 Behind your back and light up all three mirrors,
 And so send light reflected to your eyes.
 Although in magnitude the farther light
 Is no match for the others, you will find
 That of necessity it is as bright.

12 Lines 67–72: Dante's suggestion presupposed one virtue in all the stars (with them differing only in the amount they received), whereas they differ not only quantitatively but also qualitatively, since they have differing influences on the earth. Dante takes astral influence for granted: see ll. 112–23 below.

13 The *rarefied* substance.

14 The moon.

15 The possibility that the moon is composed of alternating layers of dense and rarefied substance.

Or, come ai colpi delli caldi rai
della neve riman nudo il soggetto
e dal colore e dal freddo primai,
così rimaso te nell'intelletto
voglio informar di luce sì vivace 110
che ti tremolerà nel suo aspetto.
Dentro dal ciel della divina pace
si gira un corpo nella cui virtute
l'esser di tutto suo contento giace.
Lo ciel seguente, c'ha tante vedute,
quell'esser parte per diverse essenze,
da lui distratte e da lui contenute.
Li altri giron per varie differenze
le distinzion che dentro da sé hanno
dispongono a lor fini e lor semenze. 120
Questi organi del mondo così vanno,
come tu vedi omai, di grado in grado,
che di su prendono e di sotto fanno.
Riguarda bene omai sì com'io vado
per questo loco al vero che disiri,
sì che poi sappi sol tener lo guado.
Lo moto e la virtù de' santi giri,
come dal fabbro l'arte del martello,
da' beati motor convien che spiri;
e 'l ciel, cui tanti lumi fanno bello, 130
della mente profonda che lui volve
prende l'image e fàssene suggello.
E come l'alma dentro a vostra polve
per differenti membra e conformate
a diverse potenze si risolve,
così l'intelligenza sua bontate
moltiplicata per le stelle spiega,
girando sé sovra sua unitate.
Virtù diversa fa diversa lega
col prezioso corpo ch'ella avviva, 140

Just as the matter¹⁶ which makes snow is spoiled –
 Once it's subjected to the sun's warm rays –
 Of both its former colour and its cold,
 So your intelligence has been stripped bare,
 To be informed by me with light so vivid 110
 That it will sparkle to you like a star.
 Within the heaven of peace that is divine,
 A body circles in whose power resides
 The being of everything it has within.¹⁷
 That heaven below, which many stars make bright,
 Imparts that being to those essences
 Distinct from it and yet contained in it.¹⁸
 These other spheres, each with its difference,
 Distribute all of those distinctive powers
 To have their due effects and influence. 120
 These organs of the universe go on
 From step to step, as now you understand,
 Receiving from above, delivering down.
 Consider now how I advance upon
 This road towards the truth which you desire,
 That you may learn to cross the ford alone.
 The influential movement of the spheres –
 As the hammer depends upon the smith –
 Must act inspired by sacred engineers.
 That heaven so many stars make beautiful 130
 Takes from the unfathomed Mind which keeps it turning
 That stamp from which it makes a further seal.¹⁹
 And as the soul that animates your dust –
 And thence, throughout your organs, each of which
 Differs in potency – becomes diffused,
 So does the Mind deploy its multiplied
 Beneficence throughout the various stars,
 While still revolving and still unified.
 Each different virtue makes a different blend
 Within the cherished mass it animates, 140

16 Water.

17 The Empyrean sets in motion the Primum Mobile, which in turn influences all the other spheres.

18 The sphere of the fixed stars influences all the spheres within it, and thence everything on earth.

19 Lines 127–32: the stars influence all below them, but only because they are controlled by intelligent beings (angels), as a hammer in a forge has its effect only because it is controlled by an intelligent being (the smith). All is the effect of the Supreme Intelligence, God. The metaphor in l. 132 is of sealing wax.

nel qual, sì come vita in voi, si lega.
Per la natura lieta onde deriva,
la virtù mista per lo corpo luce
come letizia per pupilla viva.
Da essa vien ciò che da luce a luce
par differente, non da denso e raro:
essa è formal principio che produce,
conforme a sua bontà, lo turbo e 'l chiaro.”

With which, like life with you, it is combined.
True to the nature whence it comes to be,
The virtue mingled with the body shines
As joy shines through the pupil of the eye.
Hence comes the difference from light to light,
Or part to part, and not from dense and rare:
The informing principle produces what,
From its goodness, is either dark or clear.”²⁰

20 Lines 133–48: God’s goodness is in everything, but in differing ways and to different degrees: the stars differ from each other, and the moon differs within itself.



"WHAT YOU ARE SEEING ARE REAL SUBSTANCES,
PLACED HERE BECAUSE THEIR VOWS WERE NOT FULFILLED"...

PARADISE III, 29-30



"MY SHINING FOREHEAD WAS ALREADY CROWNED
AS MONARCH OF THAT EARTH THE DANUBE WATERS"...

PARADISE VIII, 64-65

CANTO III

Dante is ready to accept the cogency of what Beatrice has said about the dark spots in the moon, but he is distracted by what appears to be vague reflections of people. He turns to see who they are, but is told by Beatrice that they are real, and that he should speak with them and believe whatever they say.

One of these souls says that she is Piccarda Donati, and she is in heaven, but in the lowest part of it, because she did not fulfil the vows she made as a religious. She was forced by her brother, to whom she alludes obliquely, to leave her convent and marry. Dante, who had known her in life, recognizes her now: at first the intensification of her beauty, which comes from her being in Heaven, had prevented this recognition.

Dante asks her if she does not wish she had a higher place in Heaven, and Piccarda explains that all the blessed are happy where they are, because their wills are now fully in accord with God's will. There is a hierarchy in Heaven, but no dissatisfaction.

Piccarda points out to Dante another soul who had, like herself, been a Poor Clare and was prevented from adhering to her vows. This is Constance, wife of the Emperor Henry VI and mother of the Emperor Frederick II.

Piccarda disappears, singing the 'Ave Maria', and Dante follows her with his eyes as long as he is able. He then turns to Beatrice once more, but he is so dazzled by her light that he is slow to question her further.

Quel sol che pria d'amor mi scaldò 'l petto
 di bella verità m'avea scoperto,
 provando e riprovando, il dolce aspetto;
 e io, per confessar corretto e certo
 me stesso, tanto quanto si convenne
 leva' il capo a proferer più erto;
 ma visione apparve che ritenne
 a sé me tanto stretto, per vedersi,
 che di mia confession non mi sovvenne.

Quali per vetri trasparenti e tersi,
 o ver per acque nitide e tranquille,
 non sì profonde che i fondi sien persi,
 tornan di nostri visi le postille
 debili sì che perla in bianca fronte
 non vien men tosto^a alle nostre pupille;
 tali vid'io più facce a parlar pronte;
 per ch'io dentro all'error contrario corsi
 a quel ch'accese amor tra l'omo e 'l fonte.

Sùbito sì com'io di lor m'accorsi,
 quelle stimando specchiati sembianti,
 per veder di cui fosser, li occhi torsi;
 e nulla vidi, e ritorsili avanti,
 dritti nel lume della dolce guida,
 che sorridendo ardea nelli occhi santi.

“Non ti maravigliar perch'io sorrida,”
 mi disse, “appresso il tuo pueril coto,
 poi sopra 'l vero ancor lo piè non fida,
 ma te rivolte, come suole, a vòto:
 vere sustanze son ciò che tu vedi,
 qui rilegate per manco di voto.

Però parla con esse e odi e credi;
 ché la verace luce che li appaga
 da sé non lascia lor torcer li piedi.”

Ed io, all'ombra che pareva più vaga
 di ragionar, drizza'mi e cominciai,
 quasi com'uom cui troppa voglia smaga:
 “O ben creato spirito, che a' rai
 di vita eterna la dolcezza senti

a An alternative reading, preferred by some scholars, is “*men forte*”.

That sun¹ who warmed my bosom at the first
 With love, had made, by proving and reproofing,
 Truth and its lovely aspect manifest –
 And I, admitting now that I was quite
 Persuaded and corrected, raised my head
 To speak to her, no higher than was right² –
 When a vision appeared, and my attention
 Was fixed so firmly on it as I looked
 That I quite failed to utter my confession.
 As through a sheet of smooth transparent glass, 10
 Or water that is glittering and peaceful
 And not so deep none knows how deep it is,
 The outline of our features is reflected,
 So faint that pearls upon a pearl-pale brow
 Are not more difficult to be detected –
 So I saw faces all about to utter,
 Which made me make the opposite mistake
 To what stirred love between one man and water.³
 The moment that I looked and saw them there, 20
 Imagining that they were but reflections,
 I turned around to find out whose they were –
 And I saw nothing, so I turned my gaze
 Back to the light which came from my dear guide,
 And saw the smiling in her holy eyes.
 “You must not be surprised I smile at you,”
 She said. “The reason is your childish notions
 Which still do not stand firm on what is true,
 But always send you spinning in a void:
 What you are seeing are real substances,
 Placed here because their vows were not fulfilled.⁴ 30
 So speak to them, and trust to what they say,
 Since the true light in which they find their peace
 Never permits their feet to go astray.”
 Then, to that shade who seemed most to require
 Some speech with me, I turned and I began,
 Like somebody bewildered by desire:
 “O spirit born to bliss, who in the light
 Of everlasting life enjoy that sweetness

1 Beatrice.

2 Showing his respect for Beatrice.

3 The mythical Narcissus fell in love with his reflection, thinking it was someone else: Dante is seeing real people but thinks they are reflections.

4 The reference is to religious vows.

che, non gustata, non s'intende mai,
grazioso mi fia se mi contenti
del nome tuo e della vostra sorte." 40
Ond'ella, pronta e con occhi ridenti:
"La nostra carità non serra porte
a giusta voglia, se non come quella
che vuol simile a sé tutta sua corte.
I' fui nel mondo vergine sorella;
e se la mente tua ben sé riguarda,
non mi ti celerà l'esser più bella,
ma riconoscerai ch'ï son Piccarda,
che, posta qui con questi altri beati, 50
beata sono in la spera più tarda.
Li nostri affetti, che solo infiammati
son nel piacer de lo Spirito Santo,
letizian del suo ordine formati.
E questa sorte che par giù cotanto,
però n'è data, perché fuor negletti
li nostri voti, e vòti in alcun canto."
Ond'io a lei: "Ne' mirabili aspetti
vostri risplende non so che divino
che vi trasmuta da' primi concetti: 60
però non fui a rimembrar festino;
ma or m'aiuta ciò che tu mi dici,
sì che raffigurar m'è più latino.
Ma dimmi: voi che siete qui felici,
disiderate voi più alto loco
per più vedere e per più farvi amici?"
Con quelle altr'ombre pria sorrise un poco;
da indi mi rispuose tanto lieta
ch'arder pareva d'amor nel primo foco:
"Frate, la nostra volontà quieta 70
virtù di carità, che fa volerne
sol quel ch'avemo, e d'altro non ci asseta.
Se disiassimo esser più superne,
foran discordi li nostri disiri

Uncomprehended till we taste of it,
 I should be grateful if you would apprise 40
 Me simply of your name and of your lot.”
 To which with ready voice and smiling eyes:
 “Our charity will never bar the gate
 To righteous longing, any more than His
 Whose Will is in all wills within His court.
 I was a virgin sister in the world,
 Whom if you delve into your memory,
 This greater beauty cannot keep concealed.
 But you will see I am Piccarda⁵ who,
 Placed here among these other blessed spirits, 50
 Am blessed in the sphere that is most slow.⁶
 All our affectionate desires, whose ardour
 Is kindled solely by the Holy Spirit,
 Rejoice to be contained within His order.
 This lot of ours which must appear so lowly
 Is what we have been given, since we neglected
 The vows we made, or failed to keep them wholly.”
 Then I replied: “Your marvellous semblances
 Shine out with something strange that is divine,
 Transfiguring our old remembrances: 60
 That made me slow in bringing you to mind,⁷
 But what you have just told me now is helpful:
 I recognize you and I understand.
 But tell me: you, whose happiness is here,
 Are you not ardent for a higher region,
 To see God better, see Him friendlier?”
 She and the others smiled at first, and then
 She gave her answer with such great delight
 That she seemed burning in love’s primal flame:
 “Brother, these wills of ours are set at peace 70
 By charity, which makes us only wish
 For what we have, and thirst for nothing else.
 If we were anxious for a higher sphere,
 Then our desire would be at variance with

5 The beautiful Florentine Piccarda Donati entered a convent as a Poor Clare. Her brother Corso, leader of the Black Guefts, removed her and forced her into marriage (see *Purg.* XXIV, where Dante speaks with Piccarda’s other brother, Forese).

6 The sphere of the moon which, being nearest the earth, has the shortest orbit and therefore does not need to move as fast as those beyond it.

7 Dante had known Piccarda, and was distantly related to her by marriage.

dal voler di colui che qui ne cerne;
 che vedrai non capere in questi giri,
 s'essere in carità è qui necesse
 e se la sua natura ben rimiri.
 Anzi è formale ad esto beato esse
 tenersi dentro alla divina voglia, 80
 per ch'una fansi nostre voglie stesse;
 sì che, come noi sem di soglia in soglia
 per questo regno, a tutto il regno piace
 com'allo re che 'n suo voler ne invoglia.
 E 'n la sua voluntade è nostra pace:
 ell'è quel mare al qual tutto si move
 ciò ch'ella cria o che natura face.”
 Chiaro mi fu allor come ogni dove^b
 in cielo è paradiso, *etsi*^c la grazia
 del sommo ben d'un modo non vi piove. 90
 Ma sì com'elli avvien s'un cibo sazia
 e d'un altro rimane ancor la gola,
 che quel si chere e di quel si ringrazia,
 così fec'io con atto e con parola,
 per apprender da lei qual fu la tela
 onde non trasse infino a co la spuola.
 “Perfetta vita e alto merto inciela
 donna più su,” mi disse, “alla cui norma
 nel vostro mondo giù si veste e vela,
 perché fino al morir si vegghi e dorma 100
 con quello sposo ch'ogni voto accetta
 che caritate a suo piacer conforma.
 Dal mondo, per seguirla, giovinetta
 fuggi'mi, e nel suo abito mi chiusi
 e promisi la via della sua setta.
 Uomini poi, a mal più ch'a bene usi,
 fuor mi rapiron della dolce chiostra:
 Iddio si sa qual poi mia vita fusi.
 E quest'altro splendor che ti si mostra
 dalla mia destra parte e che s'accende 110

b Used as a noun, in the same way as the Scholastics used the Latin word “*ubi*”.

c “although” (Latin).

The will of Him Who has assigned us here –
 Which in these circles simply cannot be,
 Since being in charity is here essential,
 If you consider what is charity.
 And at the heart of being beatified
 Is life within the Will that is divine, 80
 So that our various wills are unified;
 Therefore this being ranged from stair to stair
 Throughout this realm rejoices all the realm
 And the King too Whose Will involves us here.
 Within His Will at last we find our peace:
 That is the ocean into which there flows
 All He creates or nature adds to this.”⁸
 Then it was plain to me how everywhere
 In Heaven is Paradise, although God’s grace
 Does not rain down invariably there.⁹ 90
 But as it happens when our appetite,
 Sated with one food, hungers for another –
 We ask for this while giving thanks for that –
 Just so with signs and words I tried to find
 From her the nature of the web through which
 She had not drawn the shuttle to the end.
 “A lady¹⁰ is enskied high on the scale
 For worth, under whose holy rule,” she told me,
 “Down in your world they’re clothed and take the veil,
 So that, sleeping or waking, they may be 100
 With that Spouse who accepts each solemn vow
 Conforming to His Will by charity.
 I fled the world in all my youthful ardour
 To follow her, and clothed me in her habit,
 And promised to obey her holy Order.
 Then men prone more to evil than to good¹¹
 Seized me and took me from my cherished cloister:
 And after that God knows what life I led.
 This other splendour you distinguish here
 On my right side, and who is incandescent 110

8 The distinction is between what God creates out of nothing – e.g. angels and human souls – and what is produced by procreation and propagation.

9 God’s grace permeates Heaven, but not without variation between the different parts of Heaven.

10 St Clare of Assisi (c.1194–1253), friend of St Francis, under whose aegis she founded the Order of Poor Clares.

11 A gentle allusion to Piccarda’s brother Corso, or to those who acted on his orders.

di tutto il lume della spera nostra,
 ciò ch'io dico di me, di sé intende:
 sorella^d fu, e così le fu tolta
 di capo l'ombra delle sacre bende.
 Ma poi che pur al mondo fu rivolta
 contra suo grado e contra buona usanza,
 non fu dal vel del cor già mai disciolta.
 Quest'è la luce della gran Costanza
 che del secondo vento di Soave
 generò 'l terzo e l'ultima possanza.” 120
 Così parlommi, e poi cominciò “Ave,
 Maria” cantando, e cantando vanìo
 come per acqua cupa^e cosa grave.
 La vista mia, che tanto lei seguìo
 quanto possibil fu, poi che la perse,
 volsesi al segno di maggior disio,
 e a Beatrice tutta si converse;
 ma quella folgorò nel mio sguardo
 sì che da prima il viso non sofferse;
 e ciò mi fece a dimandar più tardo. 130

d i.e. “suora”, “nun”.

e Here in the sense of “profonda”: “deep”.

With all the light that's shining in our sphere,
 Could say about herself what I have said:
 She was a sister, and that sacred cover,
 Her veil, was snatched by force from off her head.
 But since she was brought back into the world
 Against her wishes and against fair usage,
 Her heart continued as it had been, veiled.
 This is the light of the great Constance: she
 Gave birth, by the second gust of Swabia,
 To the third and ultimate authority."¹² 120
 She spoke, and then she sang, "*Ave Maria*,"¹³
 And went on with her singing as she vanished
 Like something heavy sinking in deep water.
 My eyes, which had been following her as long
 As possible, soon as she disappeared
 Turned to the object of desire more strong,
 To concentrate on Beatrice once more;
 But she was shining in my face and shone
 So dazzlingly I hardly could endure,
 Which made me slow to question her again. 130

12 The three "gusts" are the Dukes of Swabia (of the Hohenstaufen dynasty), all in turn Holy Roman Emperors – Frederick Barbarossa, his son Henry VI and his grandson Frederick II. The Empress Constance (1154–98) was the wife of Henry VI and mother of Frederick II (see *Inf.* x, 119).

13 The first words of the prayer to the Virgin, "Hail, Mary".