

CANTO XI

O fond anxiety of mortal men!
How vain and inconclusive arguments
Are those, which make thee beat thy wings below
For statues one, and one for aphorisms
Was hunting; this the priesthood follow'd, that
By force or sophistry aspir'd to rule;
To rob another, and another sought
By civil business wealth; one moiling lay
Tangled in net of sensual delight,
And one to witless indolence resign'd;
What time from all these empty things escap'd,
With Beatrice, I thus gloriously
Was rais'd aloft, and made the guest of heav'n.

They of the circle to that point, each one.
Where erst it was, had turn'd; and steady glow'd,
As candle in his socket. Then within
The lustre, that erewhile bespake me, smiling
With merer gladness, heard I thus begin:

"E'en as his beam illumines me, so I look
Into the eternal light, and clearly mark
Thy thoughts, from whence they rise. Thou art in doubt,
And wouldst, that I should bolt my words afresh
In such plain open phrase, as may be smooth
To thy perception, where I told thee late
That 'well they thrive;' and that 'no second such
Hath risen,' which no small distinction needs.

"The providence, that governeth the world,
In depth of counsel by created ken
Unfathomable, to the end that she,
Who with loud cries was 'spous'd in precious blood,

Might keep her footing towards her well-belov'd,
Safe in herself and constant unto him,
Hath two ordain'd, who should on either hand
In chief escort her: one seraphic all
In fervency; for wisdom upon earth,
The other splendour of cherubic light.
I but of one will tell: he tells of both,
Who one commendeth which of them so'er
Be taken: for their deeds were to one end.

"Between Tupino, and the wave, that falls
From blest Ubaldo's chosen hill, there hangs
Rich slope of mountain high, whence heat and cold
Are wafted through Perugia's eastern gate:
And Norcera with Gualdo, in its rear
Mourn for their heavy yoke. Upon that side,
Where it doth break its steepness most, arose
A sun upon the world, as duly this
From Ganges doth: therefore let none, who speak
Of that place, say Ascesi; for its name
Were lamely so deliver'd; but the East,
To call things rightly, be it henceforth styl'd.
He was not yet much distant from his rising,
When his good influence 'gan to bless the earth.
A dame to whom none openeth pleasure's gate
More than to death, was, 'gainst his father's will,
His stripling choice: and he did make her his,
Before the Spiritual court, by nuptial bonds,
And in his father's sight: from day to day,
Then lov'd her more devoutly. She, bereav'd
Of her first husband, slighted and obscure,
Thousand and hundred years and more, remain'd
Without a single suitor, till he came.
Nor aught avail'd, that, with Amyclas, she
Was found unmov'd at rumour of his voice,
Who shook the world: nor aught her constant boldness
Whereby with Christ she mounted on the cross,
When Mary stay'd beneath. But not to deal

Thus closely with thee longer, take at large
The rovers' titles — Poverty and Francis.
Their concord and glad looks, wonder and love,
And sweet regard gave birth to holy thoughts,
So much, that venerable Bernard first
Did bare his feet, and, in pursuit of peace
So heavenly, ran, yet deem'd his footing slow.
O hidden riches! O prolific good!
Egidius bares him next, and next Sylvester,
And follow both the bridegroom; so the bride
Can please them. Thenceforth goes he on his way,
The father and the master, with his spouse,
And with that family, whom now the cord
Girt humbly: nor did abjectness of heart
Weigh down his eyelids, for that he was son
Of Pietro Bernardone, and by men
In wond'rous sort despis'd. But royally
His hard intention he to Innocent
Set forth, and from him first receiv'd the seal
On his religion. Then, when numerous flock'd
The tribe of lowly ones, that trac'd HIS steps,
Whose marvellous life deservedly were sung
In heights empyreal, through Honorius' hand
A second crown, to deck their Guardian's virtues,
Was by the eternal Spirit inwreath'd: and when
He had, through thirst of martyrdom, stood up
In the proud Soldan's presence, and there preach'd
Christ and his followers; but found the race
Unripen'd for conversion: back once more
He hasted (not to intermit his toil),
And reap'd Ausonian lands. On the hard rock,
'Twixt Arno and the Tyber, he from Christ
Took the last Signet, which his limbs two years
Did carry. Then the season come, that he,
Who to such good had destin'd him, was pleas'd
T' advance him to the meed, which he had earn'd
By his self-humbling, to his brotherhood,
As their just heritage, he gave in charge

His dearest lady, and enjoin'd their love
And faith to her: and, from her bosom, will'd
His goodly spirit should move forth, returning
To its appointed kingdom, nor would have
His body laid upon another bier.

"Think now of one, who were a fit colleague,
To keep the bark of Peter in deep sea
Helm'd to right point; and such our Patriarch was.
Therefore who follow him, as he enjoins,
Thou mayst be certain, take good lading in.
But hunger of new viands tempts his flock,
So that they needs into strange pastures wide
Must spread them: and the more remote from him
The stragglers wander, so much mole they come
Home to the sheep-fold, destitute of milk.
There are of them, in truth, who fear their harm,
And to the shepherd cleave; but these so few,
A little stuff may furnish out their cloaks.

"Now, if my words be clear, if thou have ta'en
Good heed, if that, which I have told, recall
To mind, thy wish may be in part fulfill'd:
For thou wilt see the point from whence they split,
Nor miss of the reproof, which that implies,
'That well they thrive not sworn with vanity.'"