

# Paradise Canto 14

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## Canto XIV

### Argument

Solomon, who is one of the spirits in the inner circle, declares what the appearance of the blest will be after the resurrection of the body. Beatrice and Dante are translated into the fifth heaven, which is that of Mars; and here behold the souls of those, who had died fighting for the true faith, ranged in the sign of the cross, athwart which the spirits move to the sound of a melodious hymn.

From centre to the circle, and so back  
From circle to the centre, water moves  
In the round chalice, even as the blow  
Impels it, inwardly, or from without.  
Such was the image<sup>[1]</sup> glanced into my mind,  
As the great spirit of Aquinum ceased;  
And Beatrice, after him, her words  
Resumed alternate: "Need there is (though yet  
He tells it to you not in words, nor e'en  
In thought) that he should fathom to its depth  
Another mystery. Tell him, if the light,  
Wherewith your substance blooms, shall stay with you  
Eternally, as now; and, if it doth,  
How, when<sup>[2]</sup> ye shall regain your visible forms,  
The sight may without harm endure the change,  
That also tell." As those, who in a ring  
Tread the light measure, in their fitful mirth  
Raise loud the voice, and spring with gladder bound;  
Thus, at the hearing of that pious suit,  
The saintly circles, in their tourneying  
And wondrous note, attested new delight.

[1: The voice of Thomas Aquinas proceeding from the circle to the centre; and that of Beatrice, from the centre to the circle.]

[2: "When." When ye shall be again clothed with your bodies at the resurrection.]

Whoso laments, that we must doff this garb  
Of frail mortality, thenceforth to live  
Immortally above; he hath not seen  
The sweet refreshing of that heavenly shower.<sup>[3]</sup>

[3: That effusion of beatific light.]

Him, who lives ever, and forever reigns  
In mystic union of the three in one,  
Unbounded, bounding all, each spirit thrice  
Sang, with such melody, as, but to hear,  
For highest merit were an ample meed.

And from the lesser orb the goodliest light,[4]  
With gentle voice and mild, such as perhaps  
The Angel's once to Mary, thus replied:  
"Long as the joy of Paradise shall last,  
Our love shall shine around that raiment, bright  
As fervent; fervent as, in vision, blest;  
And that as far, in blessedness, exceeding,  
As it hath grace, beyond its virtue, great.  
Our shape, regarmented with glorious weeds  
Of saintly flesh, must, being thus entire,  
Show yet more gracious. Therefore shall increase  
Whate'er, of light, gratuitous imparts  
The Supreme Good; light, ministering aid,  
The better to disclose His glory; whence,  
The vision needs increasing, must increase  
The fervour, which it kindles; and that too  
The ray, that comes from it. But as the gleed  
Which gives out flame, yet in its whiteness shines  
More livelily than that, and so preserves  
Its proper semblance; thus this circling sphere  
Of splendour shall to view less radiant seem,  
Than shall our fleshly robe, which yonder earth  
Now covers. Nor will such excess of light  
O'erpowtr us, in corporeal organs made  
Firm, and susceptible of all delight."

[4: "The goodliest light." Solomon.]

So ready and so cordial an "Amen"  
Follow'd from either choir, as plainly spoke  
Desire of their dead bodies; yet perchance  
Not for themselves, but for their kindred dear,  
Mothers and sires, and those whom best they loved,  
Ere they were made imperishable flame.

And lo! forthwith there rose up round about  
A lustre, over that already there;  
Of equal clearness, like the brightening up  
Of the horizon. As at evening hour  
Of twilight, new appearances through Heaven  
Peer with faint glimmer, doubtfully descried;

So, there, new substances, methought, began  
To rise in view beyond the other twain,  
And wheeling, sweep their ampler circuit wide.

O genuine glitter of eternal Beam!  
With what a sudden whiteness did it flow,  
O'erpowering vision in me. But so fair,  
So passing lovely, Beatrice show'd,  
Mind cannot follow it, nor words express  
Her infinite sweetness. Thence mine eyes regain'd  
Power to look up; and I beheld myself,  
Sole with my lady, to more lofty bliss[5]  
Translated: for the star, with warmer smile  
Impurpled, well denoted our ascent.

[5: "To more lofty bliss." To the planet Mars.]

With all the heart, and with that tongue which speaks  
The same in all, an holocaust I made  
To God, befitting the new grace vouchsafed.  
And from my bosom had not yet upsteam'd  
The fuming of that incense, when I knew  
The rite accepted. With such mighty sheen  
And mantling crimson, in two listed rays  
The splendours shot before me, that I cried,  
"God of Sabaoth! that dost prank them thus!"

As leads the galaxy from pole to pole,  
Distinguish'd into greater lights and less,  
Its pathway, which the wisest fail to spell;  
So thickly studded, in the depth of Mars,  
Those rays described the venerable sign,  
That quadrants in the round conjoining frame.

Here memory mocks the toil of genius. Christ  
Beam'd on that cross; and pattern fails me now.  
But whoso takes his cross, and follows Christ,  
Will pardon me for that I leave untold,  
When in the flecker'd dawning he shall spy  
The glitterance of Christ. From horn to horn,  
And 'tween the summit and the base, did move  
Lights, scintillating, as they met and pass'd.  
Thus oft are seen with ever - changeful glance,  
Straight or athwart, now rapid and now slow,  
The atomies of bodies, long or short,  
To move along the sunbeam, whose slant line  
Checkers the shadow interposed by art  
Against the noontide heat. And as the chime

Of minstrel music, dulcimer, and harp  
With many strings, a pleasant dinning makes  
To him, who heareth not distinct the note;  
So from the lights, which there appear'd to me,  
Gather'd along the cross a melody,  
That, indistinctly heard, with ravishment  
Possess'd me. Yet I mark'd it was a hymn  
Of lofty praises; for there came to me  
"Arise," and "Conquer," as to one who hears  
And comprehends not. Me such ecstasy  
O'ercame, that never, till that hour, was thing  
That held me in so sweet imprisonment.

Perhaps my saying overbold appears,  
Accounting less the pleasure of those eyes,  
Whereon to look fulfillleth all desire.  
But he, who is aware those living seals  
Of every beauty work with quicker force,  
The higher they are risen; and that there  
I had not turn'd me to them; he may well  
Excuse me that, whereof in my excuse  
I do accuse me, and may own my truth;  
That holy pleasure here not yet reveal'd  
Which grows in transport as we mount aloof.