

Paradise Canto 18

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[Christianity Index](#) [Divine Comedy Index](#) [Previous: Paradise Canto 17](#) [Next: Paradise Canto 19](#)

Canto XVIII

Argument

Dante sees the souls of many renowned warriors and crusaders in the planet Mars; and then ascends with Beatrice to Jupiter, the sixth heaven, in which he finds the souls of those who had administered justice rightly in the world, so disposed, as to form the figure of an eagle. The Canto concludes with an invective against the avarice of the clergy, and especially of the pope.

Now in his word, sole, ruminating, joy'd
That blessed spirit and I fed on mine,
Tempering the sweet with bitter. She meanwhile,
Who led me unto God, admonish'd: "Muse
On other thoughts: bethink thee, that near Him
I dwell, who recompenseth every wrong."

At the sweet sounds of comfort straight I turn'd;
And, in the saintly eyes what love was seen,
I leave in silence here, nor through distrust
Of my words only, but that to such bliss
The mind remounts not without aid. Thus much
Yet may I speak; that, as I gazed on her,
Affection found no room for other wish.
While the everlasting pleasure, that did full
On Beatrice shine, with second view
From her fair countenance my gladden'd soul
Contended; vanquishing me with a beam
Of her soft smile, she spake: "Turn thee, and list.
These eyes are not thy only Paradise."

As here, we sometimes in the looks may see
The affection mark'd, when that its sway hath ta'en
The spirit wholly; thus the hallow'd light,[1]
To whom I turn'd, flashing, bewray'd its will
To talk yet further with me, and began:
"On this fifth lodgment of the tree,[2] whose life
Is from its top, whose fruit is ever fair
And leaf unwithering, blessed spirits abide,
That were below, ere they arrived in Heaven,
So mighty in renown, as every muse
Might grace her triumph with them. On the horns

Look, therefore, of the cross: he whom I name,
Shall there enact, as doth in summer cloud
Its nimble fire." Along the cross I saw,
At the repeated name of Joshua,
A splendour gliding; nor, the word was said,
Ere it was done: then, at the naming, saw,
Of the great Maccabee,[3] another move
With whirling speed; and gladness was the scourge
Unto that top. The next for Charlemain
And for the peer Orlando, two my gaze
Pursued, intently, as the eye pursues
A falcon flying. Last, along the cross,
William, and Renard,[4] and Duke Godfrey[5] drew
My ken, and Robert Guiscard.[6] And the soul
Who spake with me, among the other lights
Did move away, and mix; and with the quire
Of heavenly songsters proved his tuneful skill.

[1: In which the spirit of Cacciaguida was enclosed.]

[2: Mars, the fifth of the heavens.]

[3: Judas Maccabaeus.]

[4: Probably not William II of Orange, and his kinsman Raimbaud, two of the crusaders under Godfrey of Bouillon, but rather the two more celebrated heroes in the age of Charlemain. The former, William I of Orange, supposed to have been the founder of the present illustrious family of that name, died about 808. The latter has been celebrated by Ariosto, under the name of Rinaldo.]

[5: Godfrey of Bouillon.]

[6: See Hell, Canto xxviii. 12.]

To Beatrice on my right I bent,
Looking for intimation, or by word
Or act, what next behoved; and did descry
Such mere effulgence in her eyes, such joy,
It pass'd all former wont. And, as by sense
Of new delight, the man, who perseveres
In good deeds, doth perceive, from day to day,
His virtue growing; I e'en thus perceived,
Of my ascent, together with the Heaven,
The circuit widen'd; noting the increase
Of beauty in that wonder. Like the change
In a brief moment on some maiden's cheek,
Which, from its fairness, doth discharge the weight
Of pudency, that stain'd it; such in her,
And to mine eyes so sudden was the change,

Through silvery whiteness of that temperate star,
Whose sixth orb now enfolded us. I saw,
Within that Jovial cresset, the clear sparks
Of love, that reign'd there, fashion to my view
Our language. And as birds, from river banks
Arisen, now in round, now lengthen'd troop,
Array them in their flight, greeting, as seems
Their new - found pastures; so, within the lights,
The saintly creatures flying, sang; and made
Now D, now I, now L, figured i' the air
First singing to their notes they moved; then, one
Becoming of these signs, a little while
Did rest them, and were mute. O nymph divine
Of Pegasean race! who souls, which thou
Inspirest, makest glorious and long - lived, as they
Cities and realms by thee; thou with thyself
Inform me; that I may set forth the shapes,
As fancy doth present them: be thy power
Display'd in this brief song. The characters,
Vocal and consonant, were five - fold seven.
In order, each, as they appear'd, I mark'd.
Diligite Justitiam, the first,
Both verb and noun all blazon'd; and the extreme,
Qui judicatis terram. In the M
Of the fifth word they held their station;
Making the star seem silver streak'd with gold.
And on the summit of the M, I saw
Descending other lights, that rested there,
Singing, methinks, their bliss and primal good.
Then, as at shaking of a lighted brand,
Sparkles innumerable on all sides
Rise scatter'd, source of augury to the unwise;
Thus more than thousand twinkling lustres hence
Seem'd reascending; and a higher pitch
Some mounting, and some less, e'en as the sun,
Which kindleth them, decreed. And when each one
Had settled in his place; the head and neck
Then saw I of an eagle, livelily
Graved in that streaky fire. Who painteth there,[7]
Hath none to guide Him: of Himself He guides:
And every line and texture of the nest
Doth own from Him the virtue fashions it.
The other bright beatitude,[8] that seem'd
Erewhile, with lili'd crowning, well content
To over-canopy the M, moved forth,
Following gently the impress of the bird.

[7: "Who painteth there." The Deity himself.]

[8: The band of spirits.]

Sweet star; what glorious and thick - studded gems
Declared to me our justice on the earth
To be the effluence of that Heaven, which thou,
Thyself a costly jewel, dost inlay.
Therefore I pray the Sovran Mind, from whom
Thy motion and thy virtue are begun,
That He would look from whence the fog doth rise,
To vitiate thy beam; so that once more[9]
He may put forth his hand 'gainst such, as drive
Their traffic in that sanctuary, whose walls
With miracles and martyrdoms were built.

[9: That he may again drive out those who buy and sell in the temple.]

Ye host of Heaven, whose glory I survey!
O beg ye grace for those, that are, on earth,
All after ill example gone astray.
War once had for his instrument the sword:
But now 'tis made, taking the bread away,[10]
Which the good Father locks from none. - And thou,
That writest but to cancel,[11] think, that they,
Who for the vineyard, which thou wastest, died,
Peter and Paul, live yet, and mark thy doings.

[10: "Taking the bread away." Excommunication, or interdiction of the Eucharist, is now employed as a weapon of warfare.]

[11: "That writest but to cancel." "And thou, Pope Boniface, who writest thy ecclesiastical censures for no other purpose than to be paid for revoking them."]

Thou hast good cause to cry, "My heart so cleaves
To him,[12] that lived in solitude remote,
And for a dance was dragg'd to martyrdom,
I wist not of the Fisherman nor Paul."

[12: "To him." The coin of Florence was stamped with the impression of John the Baptist; and, for this, the avaricious Pope is made to declare that he felt more devotion, than either for Peter or Paul.]