

# Paradise Canto 24

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Canto XXIV

Argument

St. Peter examines Dante touching Faith, and is contented with his answers.

"O Ye! in chosen fellowship advanced  
To the great supper of the blessed Lamb,  
Whereon who feeds hath every wish fulfill'd;  
If to this man through God's grace be vouchsafed  
Foretaste of that, which from your table falls,  
Or ever death his fated term prescribe;  
Be ye not heedless of his urgent will:  
But may some influence of your sacred dews  
Sprinkle him. Of the fount ye always drink,  
Whence flows what most he craves." Beatrice spake;  
And the rejoicing spirits, like to spheres  
On firm - set poles revolving, trail'd a blaze  
Of comet splendour: and as wheels, that wind  
Their circles in the horologe, so work  
The stated rounds, that to the observant eye  
The first seems still, and as it flew, the last;  
E'en thus their carols weaving variously,  
They, by the measure paced, or swift, or slow,  
Made me to rate the riches of their joy.

From that, which I did note in beauty most  
Excelling, saw I issue forth a flame  
So bright, as none was left more goodly there.  
Round Beatrice thrice it wheel'd about,  
With so divine a song, that fancy's ear  
Records it not; and the pen passeth on,  
And leaves a blank: for that our mortal speech,  
Nor e'en the inward shaping of the brain,  
Hath colours fine enough to trace such folds.

"O saintly sister mine! thy prayer devout  
Is with so vehement affection urged,  
Thou dost unbind me from that beauteous sphere."

Such were the accents towards my lady breathed  
From that blest ardour, soon as it was stay'd;

To whom she thus: "O everlasting light  
Of him, within whose mighty grasp our Lord  
Did leave the keys, which of this wondrous bliss  
He bare below! tent this man as thou wilt,  
With lighter probe or deep, touching the faith,  
By the which thou didst on the billows walk.  
If he in love, in hope, and in belief,  
Be steadfast, is not hid from thee: for thou  
Hast there thy ken, where all things are beheld  
In liveliest portraiture. But since true faith  
Has peopled this fair realm with citizens;  
Meet is, that to exalt its glory more,  
Thou, in his audience, shouldst thereof discourse."

Like to the bachelor, who arms himself,  
And speaks not, till the master have proposed  
The question, to approve, and not to end it;  
So I, in silence, arm'd me, while she spake,  
Summoning up each argument to aid;  
As was behoveful for such questioner,  
And such profession: "As good Christian ought,  
Declare thee, what is faith?" Whereat I raised  
My forehead to the light, whence this had breathed;  
Then turn'd to Beatrice; and in her looks  
Approval met, that from their inmost fount  
I should unlock the waters. "May the grace,  
That giveth me the captain of the Church  
For confessor," said I, "vouchsafe to me  
Apt utterance for my thoughts;" then added: "Sire!  
E'en as set down by the unerring style  
Of thy dear brother, who with thee conspired  
To bring Rome in unto the way of life,  
Faith of things hoped is substance, and the proof  
Of things not see; and herein doth consist  
Methinks its essence." - "Rightly hast thou deem'd,"  
Was answer'd; "if thou well discern, why first  
He hath defined it substance, and then proof."

"The deep things," I replied, "which here I scan  
Distinctly, are below from mortal eye  
So hidden, they have in belief alone  
Their being; on which credence, hope sublime  
Is built: and, therefore substance, it intends.  
And inasmuch as we must needs infer  
From such belief our reasoning, all respect  
To other view excluded; hence of proof  
The intention is derived." Forthwith I heard:  
"If thus, whate'er by learning men attain,

Were understood; the sophist would want room  
To exercise his wit." So breathed the flame  
Of love; then added: "Current is the coin  
Thou utter'st, both in weight and in alloy.  
But tell me, if thou hast it in thy purse."

"Even so glittering and so round," said I,  
"I not a whit misdoubt of its assay."  
Next issued from the deep - imbosom'd splendour:  
"Say, whence the costly jewel, on the which  
Is founded every virtue, came to thee."

"The flood," I answer'd, "from the Spirit of God  
Rain'd down upon the ancient bond and new,[1] -  
Here is the reasoning that convinceth me  
So feelingly, each argument beside  
Seems blunt and forceless in comparison."  
Then heard I: "Wherefore holdest thou that each,  
The elder proposition and the new,  
Which so persuade thee, are the voice of Heaven?"

[1: "The ancient bond and new." The Old and New Testaments.]

"The works, that follow'd, evidence their truth,"  
I answer'd: "Nature did not make for these  
The iron hot, or on her anvil mould them."

"Who voucheth to thee of the works themselves,"  
Was the reply, "that they in very deed  
Are that they purport? None hath sworn so to thee."

"That all the world," said I, "should have been turn'd  
To Christian, and no miracle been wrought,  
Would in itself be such a miracle,  
The rest were not an hundredth part so great.  
E'en thou went'st forth in poverty and hunger  
To set the goodly plant, that, from the vine  
It once was, now is grown unsightly bramble."

That ended, through the high celestial court  
Resounded all the spheres, "Praise we one God!"  
In song of most unearthly melody.  
And when that Worthy[2] thus, from branch to branch,  
Examining, had led me, that we now  
Approach'd the topmost bough; he straight resumed:  
"The grace, that holds sweet dalliance with thy soul  
So far discreetly hath thy lips unclosed;  
That, whatsoever has past them, I commend.  
Behoves thee to express, what thou believest,  
The next; and, whereon, thy belief hath grown."

[2: "Quel Baron." In the next Canto, St. James is called "Barone." So in Boccaccio, G. vi. N. 10, we find "Baron Messer Santo Antonio."]

"O saintly sire and spirit!" I began,  
"Who seest that, which thou didst so believe,  
As to outstrip feet younger than thine own,  
Toward the sepulchre; thy will is here,  
That I the tenour of my creed unfold;  
And thou, the cause of it, hast likewise ask'd.  
And I reply: I in one God believe;  
One sole eternal Godhead, of whose love  
All Heaven is moved, Himself unmoved the while.  
Nor demonstration physical alone,  
Or more intelligential and abstruse,  
Persuades me to this faith: but from that truth  
It cometh to me rather, which is shed  
Through Moses; the rapt Prophets; and the Psalms;  
The Gospel; and what ye yourselves did write,  
When ye were gifted of the Holy Ghost.

I  
three eternal Persons I believe;  
Essence threefold and one; mysterious league  
Of union absolute, which, many a time,  
The word of gospel lore upon my mind  
Imprints: and from this germ, this firstling spark  
The lively flame dilates; and, like Heaven's star,  
Doth glitter in me." As the master hears,  
Well pleased, and then enfoldeth in his arms  
The servant, who hath joyful tidings brought,  
And having told the errand keeps his peace;  
Thus benediction uttering with song,  
Soon as my peace I held, compass'd me thrice

The apostolic radiance, whose behest  
Had oped my lips: so well their answer pleased.