

**PARADISO  
BOOK THREE OF THE  
DIVINE COMEDY**

*Dante Alighieri*

*Translated by C.E. Wheeler*



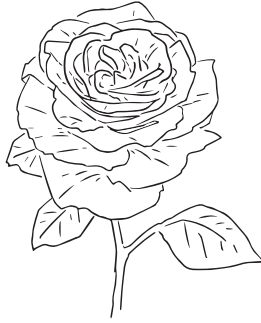


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## CANTO I

*Subject matter and invocation. The sun is in the equinoctial point. It is midday at Purgatory and midnight at Jerusalem, when Dante sees Beatrice gazing at the sun and instinctively imitates her gesture, looking away from her and straight at the sun. The light glows as though God had made a second sun, and Dante now turns once more to Beatrice who is gazing heavenward. As he looks his human nature is transmuted to the quality of heaven and he knows not whether he is still in the flesh or no. They pass through the sphere of fire and hear the harmonies of heaven, but Dante is bewildered because he knows not that they have left the earth, and when enlightened by Beatrice he is still perplexed to know how he can rise, counter to gravitation. Beatrice, pitying the delirium of his earthly mind, explains to him the law of universal (material and spiritual) gravitation. All things seek their true place, and in the orderly movement thereto, and rest therein, consists the likeness of the universe to God. Man's place is God, and to rise to him is therefore natural to man. It is departing from him that (like fire darting downwards) is the anomaly that needs to be explained.*

The glory of the Lord Who all things sways,  
Down throughout all our universe descendeth;  
Here more, here less, it gives its glowing rays.

Within that heav'n where most His light He lendeth,\* 4  
 Lo! I have been; and things have seen which now  
 To tell again, knowledge and power transcendeth,  
 Because our intellect such depths doth know 7  
 When drawing near to its desire profound,  
 That memory no more can backward flow.  
 Yet all the treasure that by me was bound 10  
 Within my memory of that kingdom blest,  
 Shall now be matter for this song to sound.  
 O high Apollo for this task, the last, 13  
 Make me a vessel with thy worth so fraught  
 That on my brows may thy dear laurel rest.  
 Till now, one of Parnassus' peaks has brought 16  
 Me aid enough, but now on both I call,  
 Ere this my final wrestling may be wrought.†  
 Enter ray bosom, and there breathe withal, 19  
 As when thou drewest forth Marsyas in pain  
 Out from the sheath that clad his members all. ‡  
 Virtue divine, if thou to lend wouldst deign 22  
 Enough, as shall the shadow e'en set free  
 Of the blessed kingdom graven on my brain.  
 Then shalt thou see me come to thy fair tree, 25  
 Then crown me with those leaves, for which the theme  
 And thou, shall make my worth sufficient be.  
 So rarely, Father, doth its beauty gleam 28  
 For Caesar's or for poet's triumphing,

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\* This is the Emyrean, the heaven of heavens, to which Dante is progressing.

† Only one peak of Parnassus, the peak of the Muses, has been sufficient, but now Dante asks for aid from Cyrrha, the peak of Apollo, the god of the sun—a significant image in *Paradiso*.

‡ Marsyas was a Greek who challenged Apollo to a music competition; Apollo won and flayed him. Here Dante sees this as a positive example since by being freed from his body he will be able to sing of heavenly things.

(Through fault and shame of human wills I deem),  
 That in the joyous Delphic god should spring 31  
 Gladness, by leaf Peneian brought to birth,  
 When any soul for it is hungering.  
 Great flame can rise from spark of little worth, 34  
 Perchance shall prayers of better voices gain  
 Response from Cyrrha after me on earth. §  
 The lantern of the world to mortal men 37  
 Rises through diverse straits, but from that one  
 Which joins four circles in three crosses plain,  
 Linked to a happier star, and free to run 40  
 A better course, he comes, and tempereth more  
 The wax o' the world, to stamp his seal thereon.  
 This strait had all but wrought that day should pour 43  
 On this side, night on that; this hemisphere  
 All white, and black the hue the other wore; ¶  
 When on her left side turned, I saw appear 46  
 Beatrice, while on the sun she set her gaze;  
 No eagle ever fixed its sight so clear.  
 And as from out the first the second rays 49  
 Will ever come and upward rise anon,  
 (As pilgrims longing for the homeward ways)  
 So to her deed, which through mine eyes upon 52  
 Imagination poured, mine own replied,  
 And past all wont I gazed upon the sun.  
 There much is granted, which is here denied 55  
 To mortal powers, through virtue of the place  
 Made that the race of man should there abide.  
 Not long endured I, nor so little space 55

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§ Rarely do men win the laurel wreath ("leaf Peneian"), a honor often bestowed on victors (like Caesar) or poets.

¶ On earth it is night, while in the heavens it is bright day.

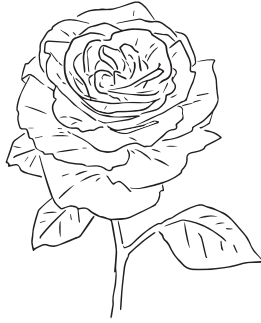
But that round him I saw the sparkles fly,  
 Like iron molten from the furnaces.  
 It seemed as day to day were suddenly 61  
 Added, as though the Power unsurpassed  
 Had set a second sun within the sky.  
 With eyes upon th'eternal wheels fixed fast 64  
 Stood Beatrice; and I fixed mine on her  
 Withdrawn from things above perforce at last  
 Within me, at the sight, new feelings stir; 67  
 E'en as felt Glaucus, who the grass did taste  
 That made him such as all the sea-gods were.\*  
 Beyond humanity thus to be placed 70  
 Transcendeth speech; the example serves enow  
 Him who may be by this experience graced.  
 If, of myself, I was but that which thou 73  
 Createdst new. Love by whom heaven is swayed,  
 Thou know'st, whose light uplifted me, I trow  
 That wheel, which longs for thee and so is made 76  
 Eternal, drew my mind with harmonies  
 By thee all tempered and distinguished;†  
 And so much heav'n seemed kindled to my eyes 79  
 With the sun's flame, that rain or river, ne'er  
 Spread near so wide a vast lake's boundaries.  
 The newness of the sound, the light's great flare, 82  
 Enkindled great desire their cause to see,  
 Keener than aught before 'twas mine to bear.  
 Whence she, who as myself I knew, knew me, 85

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\* Glaucus was a mythical fisherman who saw his fish revive when it touched a magic plant. He ate the plant and turned into a sea god (Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 13.898-968).

† "That wheel" is the Primum Mobile, the outermost sphere before you reach the Empyrean, and which moves the other spheres.





## CANTO II

*Warning and promise to the reader, who shall see a stranger tilth than when Jason sowed the dragon's teeth. They reach the moon and inconceivably penetrate into her substance without cleaving it, even as deity penetrated into humanity in Christ; which mystery shall in heaven be seen as axiomatic truth. Dante, dimly aware of the inadequacy of his science, questions Beatrice as to the dark patches on the moon which he had thought were due to rarity of substance. She explains that if such rarity pierced right through the moon in the dark parts, the sun would shine through them when eclipsed; and if not, the dense matter behind the rare would cast back the sun's light; and describes to him an experiment by which he may satisfy himself that in that case the light reflected from the dense matter at the surface and from that in the interior of the moon would be equally bright. She then explains that Dante has gone wrong and accepted a scientifically inadequate explanation, because he has not understood that all heavenly phenomena are direct utterances of God and of his Angels. The undivided power of God, differentiated through the various heavenly bodies and agencies, shines in the diverse quality and brightness of the fixed stars, of the planets and of the parts of the moon, as the vital principle manifests itself diversely in the several members of the body, and as joy beams through the pupil of the eye.*

O ye, who in your little skiff, all fain  
 To listen, follow yet with constancy  
 My ship, that singing cleaves the open main;  
 Turn to your shores, and put not forth to sea, 4  
 For now perchance too rashly may ye fare,  
 And stray bewildered, losing touch with me.  
 The seas I sail have been passed over ne'er; 7  
 Apollo guides, Minerva sends the wind,  
 And the nine Muses point me to the Bear,\*  
 Ye other few, who, necks outstretched, have pined 10  
 Timely for bread of angels, which doth keep  
 Life here, though none full satisfaction find;†  
 Well now may ye thrust forth unto the deep 13  
 Your bark, and keep my furrow's line, before  
 The waters can subside again to sleep.  
 The famed ones who to Colchis fared, not more 16  
 Did marvel, than shall ye, when in their sight  
 Jason the labor of the plowman bore.‡  
 The thirst, born with us of unfailing might 19  
 For kingdoms god-like, swept us near as fast  
 As ye can see the wheeling heaven bright.  
 Mine eyes on Beatrice, upward hers, were cast; 22  
 Perchance in time as long as an arrow stays  
 And flies, and from the notch is loosed, I passed  
 To where a thing, that set me all amaze, 25  
 Compelled my sight to it; and therefore she,

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\* Minerva is the god of wisdom; Apollo, of poets; and the Muses, of the arts. The bears are Ursa Major and Minor.

† The bread of angels is wisdom—theology and philosophy specifically—but it alone does not satisfy.

‡ The Argonauts went with Jason to fetch the fleece from Colchis, and they marveled when he successfully plowed a field with fire-breathing oxen.

(Since that no act of mine escaped her gaze)  
 Equal in joy and beauty turned to me, 28  
 And said, "Give thanks to God Who makes us one  
 With the first star of heaven's company."§  
 There seemed a veil of cloud about us spun, 31  
 But shining, solid, glittering and dense,  
 As diamond sharp smitten by the sun.  
 The eternal pearl in its circumference, 34  
 Received us there, as takes the water deep  
 The ray of light, itself uncloven thence.  
 If we know not, (if manhood I did keep) 37  
 How one dimension bore the other, though  
 It must, if body into body creep.  
 The more desire within our hearts should glow, 40  
 To see that essence, wherein 'tis enscrolled  
 How human nature into God's could flow.  
 There shall be seen, what now by faith we hold, 43  
 Not demonstrated, but self-known, appraised  
 Like primal truth man's credence can enfold.  
 "My lady," answered I, the while I gazed, 46  
 "Devout indeed is now my thankfulness  
 To Him Who from the mortal world hath raised;  
 "But tell me how this body doth possess 49  
 These shadowy marks, by which on earth are led  
 The folk to speak of Cain and vainly guess."¶  
 Somewhat she smiled, and then, "And if," she said, 52  
 "Mortal opinion err, when by the key  
 Of sense the lock may not be opened;

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§ They are entering the sphere of the moon, which the medieval thought was one of the seven planets.

¶ Medievals linked the spots on the moon with the Mark of Cain. Dante wonders what the spots really are.

"Nowise should shafts of wonder pierce through thee, 55  
 Since even following in the wake of sense,  
 Thou seest how short the wings of reason be.  
 "But tell me what thou hast concluded thence." 58  
 And I, "That which appears diversely wrought,  
 "I hold is made by bodies rare and dense."  
 And she, "In falsity thou wilt see thy thought 61  
 Submersed, when thou hast heard the argument  
 Opposed to it, which shall by me be brought.  
 "From the eighth sphere to you the lights are sent 64  
 Many, which diverse countenances bring  
 In kind or quantity of their content.\*  
 "If rare or dense alone produced this thing, 67  
 One self-same virtue then were in them all,  
 Though more to this and less to that might cling.  
 "But diverse virtues, needs as fruits must fall 70  
 Of formal principles, which must all fade  
 Save one, if right thy reasoning I call.  
 "Again if rarity the darkness made 73  
 Whose cause thou seekest, either then there were  
 Within this planet, parts on which are laid  
 "Less matter, or as fat and lean occur 76  
 In bodies, so would here be alternated,  
 The pages of its volume's register.  
 "Were the first true, the proof would be created 79  
 At sun eclipses, by light shining through,  
 As when by aught else thin it is translated.†  
 "This is not so; now must we turn to view 82

---

\* The eighth sphere is the sphere of the fixed stars, between Saturn and the Primum Mobile.

† Beatrice says the spots cannot be caused by density, since that would mean in an eclipse—when the sun gets behind the moon—light would shine through.

The other case, and false thy thought I'll show,  
 If I perchance make vain this second too.  
 "If this rare matter not throughout doth go, 85  
 Needs must there be a limit furnished,  
 Through which it may not pass, and this will throw  
 "Backward the other's ray discomfited, 88  
 Even as color doth from glass return,  
 When at its back is hidden store of lead.  
 "Now wilt thou say that darkened we discern 91  
 The ray in this place rather than elsewhere,  
 Because recast from further back; but learn  
 "How from this plea, if thou for proof shouldst care, 94  
 Experiment may disentangle thee,  
 A fount the rivers of your arts should share.  
 "Three mirrors shalt thou take, two equally 97  
 Remove from thee, between them let thine eyes  
 Seek out the third one, more remote to see:  
 "Then at thy back, turned on them let arise 100  
 A light, the three to kindle, and from all  
 To come back to thee, smitten equalwise.  
 "Although the distant shall not show withal 103  
 As great in its extent, thou'lt see no less,  
 Its brilliance will in equal measure fall.‡  
 "Now—as beneath the warm rays' eager stress, 106  
 Is stripped from off the deeper layers of snow,  
 Their primal color and their iciness —  
 "O'er thee, stripped in thine intellect, shall flow 109  
 A light whose life doth with such brightness shine,  
 That quivering to thy vision it will show.  
 "Within the heaven of the peace divine 112

---

‡ Beatrice proves her point by saying that no matter how far mirrors are, they will equally reflect light.



## CANTO III

*As Dante is about to speak he sees the faint outlines of human features and looking behind him but sees nothing. Beatrice smiles at his taking the most real existences he has ever yet beheld for mere semblances, tells him why they are there and bids him address them. Dante learns from Piccarda that each soul in heaven rejoices in the whole order of which it is part, and therefore desires no higher place than is assigned to it, for such desire would violate the law of love, and therefore the harmony of heaven. He further learns Piccarda's history and that of Constance. After which the souls disappear and Dante's eyes return to Beatrice.*

That sun, which warmed my heart with love in youth  
Had shown by proof and refutation's stress  
The fair and pleasant aspect of the truth;  
And I, as was but fitting, to confess 4  
Myself corrected and assured in mind,  
Threw up my head to speak with eagerness.  
But then appeared a sight with power to bind 7  
Itself so close, that as I, gazing, stayed.  
No thought for my confession could I find.  
As from transparent glass and polished, 10  
Or from a stream that clear and tranquil lies,

Yet not so deep that darkness veils its bed,  
 Notes of our faces come in such faint guise, 13  
 That pearls on a' white brow come not more slow  
 To recognition; so unto mine eyes  
 Came many faces, rife for speech, and lo! 16  
 I fell into th' opposing error there  
 To that made love 'twixt man and fountain glow.  
 As quickly as of these I grew aware, 19  
 Since they must be reflected forms I thought,  
 I turned mine eyes to see from whence they were.  
 Then turned them back again, beholding naught, 22  
 Straight on the light of that sweet guide of me,  
 Whose eyes more shining by her smile were wrought.  
 "Marvel not that I smile," thereon said she, 25  
 Before thy childlike thought, that makes thee veer,  
 Even as is its wont to vanity,  
 "And on the truth, trusts not its foot for fear. 28  
 True substances are these thou hast descried,  
 For their vows' failure relegated here.  
 "So speak with them, and hear, and satisfied 31  
 Believe, for that true light, that sates their need,  
 Lets not their feet from it be turned aside."  
 Then to that shade that seemed most fain indeed 34  
 To speak, as one who all o'erwhelmed stays  
 By great desire, I turned to say with heed;  
 "O well-created soul, that in the rays 37  
 Of life eternal dost that sweetness taste,  
 That he who feels not, cannot learn to praise;  
 "Wouldst thou content me, thus were I well graced 40  
 To know thy name, and what may be your fate."  
 Then she with smiling eyes and eager haste;  
 "Our love no further seeks to bar the gate, 43

To the first wish, than doth that love whose will  
 Is that her court her love should imitate.  
 "On earth a virgin sister, I; if still 46  
 Thy memory be searched, my greater show  
 Of beauty will no more my name conceal,  
 "And lo! Piccarda thou again wilt know, 49  
 Who with these other blessed ones at peace,  
 Is happy in the sphere that moves most slow.\*  
 "Our loves, that only flame as it doth please 52  
 The Holy Spirit, are right glad to be  
 Shaped in the order that His will decrees,  
 "And this our lot that lowly seems to thee, 55  
 Is given for vows neglected once by us,  
 Or in some way made void unfittingly."  
 Then I: "Within your aspects marvelous, 58  
 Gloweth again a something all divine,  
 To change you from your earlier semblance thus;  
 "Therefore delayed this memory of mine; 61  
 But now thy speech doth give me so much aid,  
 That clearer far I can thy face define.  
 "But tell me, ye whose bliss is here displayed, 64  
 Desire ye ever spheres that are more high,  
 To have more sight or dearer to be made?"  
 They smiled a little; then she made reply, 67  
 With such a joyous mien, it seemed methought  
 Love's springtide flame possessed her utterly;  
 "Brother, our will to peacefulness is wrought 70  
 By worth of love, that makes us long alone  
 For what we have, else makes us thirst for naught.

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\* Piccarda Donati was the sister of Forese (*Purgatory* XXIII) and was forced to come out of a monastery to marry a man against her will; she died after the wedding.



“Did we desire a higher sphere to own, 73  
 Then would our longing all discordant be,  
 Unto His will, to Whom our place is known.  
 “And that, these circles must forbid thou’lt see, 76  
 If it is needful here to live in love,  
 And if love’s nature be conceived by thee.  
 “The essence of this blest life is to prove 79  
 One with the will divine, blending until  
 Our wills themselves unto one ending move.  
 “That we from threshold unto threshold still 82  
 Mount through this realm, makes all its joy increase,  
 And His, who draws our wills unto His will.  
 “And His desire is our abiding peace; 85  
 All it creates, and Nature shapeth fair,  
 Moves on to it, as rivers to the seas.”  
 Clear was it then to me, how everywhere 88  
 In Heav’n is Paradise, though Highest Good  
 Its grace not only in one way sheds there.  
 But as it happens when a certain food 91  
 Sateth, if yet a second stirs desire,  
 We ask for it though thankful in our mood;  
 So did I in both act and word require 94  
 Of her to learn, what was the web, whereon  
 She had not drawn the shuttle yet entire.†  
 “A loftier heaven hath a lady won 97  
 By perfect life and merit, for whose sake,  
 The veil and garments women oft will don  
 “On earth, that unto Death, they sleep and wake 100  
 With Him, the Bridegroom, Who by vows is wed

---

† Dante wonders why Piccarda is in the sphere of those who have not kept their vows; why did she not finish drawing the shuttle through the web to finish weaving the cloth.

Which love well pleasing to Him strives to make.  
 "To follow her while yet a girl, I fled, 103  
 And in her habit wrapped, the world resigning,  
 Vowed in the pathway of her band to tread.  
 "Then men to evil more than good inclining, 106  
 Tore me from my sweet cloister, and God knows  
 Thereafter what my life was. And this shining,  
 "This other splendor that before thee shows, 109  
 Who on my right hand kindled seems to be  
 With all the light within our sphere that glows,  
 "She understands all that I tell to thee; 112  
 The shadow of the sacred veil was ta'en  
 From off her head, although a sister she.  
 "But though thus turned unto the world again, 115  
 Against good custom, in her will's despite,  
 From her heart's veil unloosed did she remain.  
 "For this of that great Constance is the light, 118  
 Who from the second Swabian stormblast,  
 Conceived the third and final power of might."\*  
 Thus spoke she, and "Ave Maria" at last 121  
 Began to sing, and like a heavy weight  
 Through the deep water, from my vision passed.  
 Mine eyes that followed her departing straight 124  
 As far as could be, when that sight must cease,  
 Turned to the mark of a desire more great,  
 And bent their gaze in all on Beatrice, 127  
 But she so flashed upon my look, that first  
 My vision could not bear the light's increase.  
 Wherefore I lingered, ere to ask I durst. 130

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\* Piccarda points out the Empress Constance (1154-1198) is here as well because she too was taken forcibly from the monastery. She bore Emperor Frederick II (1194-1250) who was the most recent Roman Emperor.