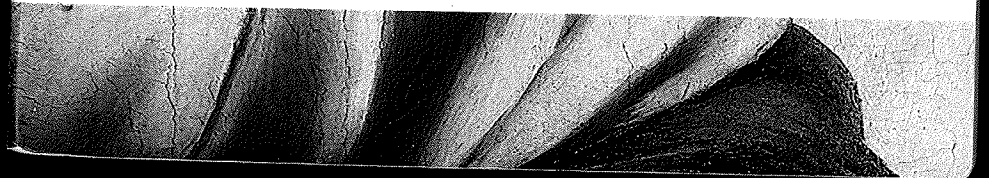




Dante
The Divine Comedy

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS



25 This tranquil and happy kingdom, so populous
With people of the old and new dispensations,
Had sight and love fixed on a single mark.

28 O threefold light which in a single star,
Sparkling upon their sight, so satisfies them!
Look down here upon us in our storm!

31 If the barbarians, coming from a quarter
Every day covered by Hélice,
Circling with her son whom she adores,

34 Were stupefied upon seeing Rome
And her immense monuments, when the Lateran
Went beyond any other mortal construction;

37 I, who had come from human to divine,
From time to what is eternal,
From Florence to a people that is just and sane,

40 What stupefaction must I be filled with!
Between that and my joy I was more than willing
To hear nothing, and to stay silent myself.

43 And like a pilgrim who refreshes himself
In the temple he had vowed to go to and, looking round,
Already hopes to tell people what it looks like,

46 Travelling upwards through the living light
I ran my eyes over all the tiers,
Now high, now low, then going round again.

49 I saw faces full of charity,
Lit by another's light and their own smiles,
And gestures which bore all the marks of honour.

52 My glance had already taken in
How paradise in general was arranged
But had not yet rested anywhere;

55 And I turned with my eagerness alight
To ask my lady about those matters
Concerning which my mind was in suspense.

CANTO XXXI

In form then of a shining white rose,
The holy army of those of whom, in his blood,
Christ made his spouse, made its appearance to me;

4 But the other army which, as it flies, sees and sings
The glory of him who fills them with his love
And the goodness which made them as they are,

7 Like a swarm of bees, landing upon flowers
At one moment and then at once returning
To where its work is turned into sweetness,

10 Descended into that great flower, which is dressed
In so many petals, and then rose up again
To where their love lives eternally.

13 Their faces were all of living flame,
Their wings of gold, the rest was all white
To a degree which snow never reached.

16 When they went into the flower, from tier to tier
They offered some of that peace and ardour
They had acquired in their upward flight.

19 Nor did the interposing of so many
In flight between the distant heights and the flower
Interfere with my seeing or with the reflections;

22 For the divine light is such as to penetrate
Wherever there is worthiness to receive it,
So that nothing can stand in its way.

58 I intended one thing, but what happened was different:
I thought I should see Beatrice, and saw an old man
Dressed like one of the glorious company.

61 In his eyes and over his cheeks there was
An air of benign happiness, and his manner
Was what you might see in a tender father.

64 'And where is she?' I said suddenly.
He answered: 'It was for your final satisfaction
That Beatrice asked me to leave my place;

67 And if you look up in the third circle
Below the highest, you will see her again,
On the throne for which her merits destined her.'

70 Without answering, I lifted up my eyes
And saw her making a crown for herself
Reflecting as she did the eternal light.

73 From the highest region in which thunder begins,
No mortal eye is ever so far distant
Though it is plunged in the bottom of the sea,

76 As my sight was there, from Beatrice;
But it made no difference, for her image
Did not come down to me through any atmosphere.

79 'O lady in whom my hope always springs,
And who for my salvation have submitted
To leave the print of your feet in hell,

82 By all the many things that I have seen,
I recognise the grace and the capacity
There is in your power and your goodness.

85 You have brought me from servitude
To liberty, through all those ways and means
Which you had it in your power to use.

88 Continue your munificence to me
So that my soul, which you have made whole,
May please you when it is united from my body.'

So I prayed; and she, so far away
As she appeared, smiled and regarded me;
Then turned away to the eternal fountain.

And the holy man said: 'So that you may
Perfectly finish the path on which you are set
—The end for which prayer and holy love sent me here—

Let your eyes wander over this garden;
For seeing it will make your sight more fit
To climb at last through the divine ray.

And the queen of heaven, for whom I am completely
Consumed with love, will grant the grace we need
Because I am her faithful Bernard.'

As one who comes perhaps from Croatia
In order to see our Veronica
And, from a long desire, cannot see enough,

But says to himself, as long as it is exhibited,
'My Lord Jesus, my Christ, my true God,
And was it like that that you appeared?'

So was I, gazing on the live charity
Of him who, by his contemplation,
Enjoyed this peace while still in the world.

'Child of grace,' he began, 'this manner of existence
In delight, will never be known to you
If you keep your eyes here at the bottom;

Look at the tiers up to the furthest of them
Until you see where the queen is sitting
To whom this kingdom is devoutly subject.'

I raised my eyes; and as, in the morning,
The eastern part of the horizon
Overwhelms that in which the sun goes down,

So, as if travelling from the valley to the mountain
With my eyes, I saw a point on the ridge
Which was brighter than all the rest beside it.

124 And as the point where we await the chariot
Which Phaeton drove so badly, is most ablaze
And on either side of it the light fades,

127 So that pacific red and gold onflamme
Animated the centre, and on each side
The flames gradually lost their intensity.

130 And at that centre, with their wings outstretched,
I saw more than a thousand angels celebrating,
Each one different in brilliance and in manner.

133 I saw smiling on their games and songs
A beauty which was all happiness
In the eyes of all the other saints there.

136 And if I had as much wealth in words
As in imagining, I would not dare
To attempt even the least of her delightfulnesses.

139 As Bernard saw that my eyes
Were fixed attentively on the ardour of his ardour,
He turned his own to her with such love

142 As made mine burn the more to look again.

CANTO XXXII

Absorbed in his pleasure, that contemplative,
Unasked, took on the office of a teacher
And made a start with these holy words:

4 'The wound which Mary closed up and anointed
Was opened and made worse by her who sits
At Mary's feet, and is so beautiful.

7 Beneath her, in the third tier of places
In order from the top, there Rachel sits
With Beatrice beside her, as you see.

Sarah, Rebecca, Judith and the woman
Who was great-grandmother to that singer
Who for his fault said "*Miserere mei*,"

13 These you may see, descending tier by tier,
As I have named them to you, going down
Petal by petal through the great rose.

16 And from the seventh tier down, just as you see
Above it, is a line of Hebrew women
Set as a parting in the rose's hair;

19 Because, according as people looked to Christ
In faith, they are divided by the wall
These women make upon the sacred steps.

22 On one side, where the flower is in bloom
With all its petals, you will see seated
Those whose belief was that Christ would come:

25 On the other side, on which the semicircles
Are broken by empty places here and there,
Are those who looked towards the Christ who had come.

28 And as on this side there is the glorious seat
Of the lady of heaven and the other seats
Below her, which make the great division,

31 So, opposite there is that of the great John
Who, ever holy, endured the desert and martyrdom,
And after that was two years in hell:

34 And below him Francis, Benedict, Augustine
And others so on down from tier to tier,
Have the task of marking the separation.

37 Now marvel at divine providence;
For each of the two aspects of the faith
Will fill an equal part of this garden.

40 And know that downwards from this circle
Which cuts in two the two lines of separation,
Is the place of those here for no merits of their own,

43 But for those of others, under certain conditions;
For all these are spirits which were released
Before they had any real power of choice.

46 You can indeed see it by their faces
And also by their having children's voices,
If you look at them closely and listen carefully.

49 Now you are wondering and, wondering, say nothing;
But I will loosen for you the hard bonds
In which your subtle thoughts are tying you up.

52 Within the length and breadth of this kingdom
There is no such thing as a place left to chance,
Any more than there is sadness or thirst or hunger;

55 For whatever you see has been established
By eternal law, so that everything fits
As closely as the ring does to the finger.

58 And therefore these who came so early
To true life are not without reason
Divided into more and less excellent.

61 The king by whose power this kingdom stays
In so much love and in such delight
That no one dares to will anything beyond it,

64 Creating all minds in the happiness
Of his own sight, endows them with grace
Differently, as he pleases; and that is enough.

67 And this is set out clearly and expressly
In the holy scripture about those twins
Who quarrelled even in their mother's womb.

70 For the supreme light properly determines
That how much grace each shall be crowned with
Shall depend on the colour of his hair.

73 Because, without meritorious behaviour,
They have been placed here in different tiers
Only because of difference in endowment.

In the earliest centuries all that was needed
To gain salvation, for the innocent,
Was that the child's parents should have faith.

Then when the first ages were completed,
Male children had to be circumcised
If they were to find any strength in their innocent wings.

But then the time of the redemption came,
If they were without the perfect baptism of Christ
Such innocents were kept down below.

Look now upon the face which most resembles
That of Christ, because only its brightness
Can make you capable of seeing Christ.

I saw rain down upon her so much happiness
Borne by those holy intelligences
Which were created to fly at such altitudes,

That all that I had seen before that
Did not keep me so suspended in wonder
Nor showed me so much of what God was like.

And that love which first came down to her
Singing '*Ave Maria, gratia plena*,
Spread his wings out before her now.

There was answer to the divine versicle
From every side, in that court of the blessed,
So that every face was the more serene for it.

'O holy father who for my sake
Are willingly down here, leaving the sweet place
Where it is your eternal lot to sit,

Who is that angel who with such delight
Looks into the eyes of our queen
So in love that he seems to be all fire?'

So once again I went for my instruction
To him who took his beauty from Mary
As the morning star takes it from the sun.

109 And he to me: 'Resolution and gaiety,
As much as there can be in angel or human soul,
There is in him: and we all want it to be so,

112 Because he is the one who took the palm
Down to Mary, when the Son of God
Elected to take on the burden of flesh.

115 But now let your eyes follow me round
As I am speaking: observe the great patricians
Of this most just and charitable empire.

118 Those two who are sitting up there, most fortunate
In being placed closest to the Empress,
Are as it were the two roots of the rose.

121 He who is sitting next to her on the left
Is the father through whose audacious tasting
The human race tastes such bitterness.

124 On the right you see that ancient father
Of the Holy Church to whom Christ entrusted
The keys of this so beautiful flower.

127 And he who, before he died, saw
All the heavy days of that lovely spouse
Who was won by the spear and by the nails,

130 Sits beside him; and by the side of the other one
Is the leader under whom that ungrateful, changeable
Recalcitrant people once lived on manna.

133 Opposite Peter I saw Anna sitting,
So content to be gazing at her daughter
That she did not move her eyes to sing Hosanna.

136 And opposite the greatest paterfamilias
Sits Lucy, who sent your lady after you
When you, head down, were going to your ruin.

139 But because the time of your vision is fleeting,
Let us stop here, as a good tailor does
Who cuts his coat according to his cloth;

And let us turn our eyes to the primal love
So that, looking towards him, you may penetrate
As far as possible through his refuge.

145 In truth, in case you should fall back
When you move your wings, thinking to go forwards,
It is proper that you should seek grace in prayer;

148 Grace from her who is able to assist you;
And you will follow me with your love
So that your heart does not stray from my words.'

And he began to pray this holy prayer. 151

CANTO XXXIII

'Virgin mother, daughter of your son,
Humble and exalted beyond any other creature,
The settled end of the eternal plan,

4 You are she who made human nature
So noble, that the maker of it himself
Did not scorn to have himself made by it.

7 In your womb was lit again that love
By whose warmth, in the eternal peace,
This flower has germinated as it is.

10 For us here you are a midday blaze
Of love; and down there, among mortals,
You are the ever-living spring of hope.

13 Lady, you are so great, and have such power,
That whoever seeks grace without recourse to you
Is like someone wanting to fly without wings.

16 You are so benign that you not only help
Whoever asks you but, very often,
Spontaneously give before the prayer is made.

19 In you there is mercy, in you there is pity,
In you magnificence, in you there is
Whatever goodness there ever was in creatures.

22 Now this man who from the lowest sink
Of the universe has seen one by one
How spirits live, from there to this point,

25 Implores you, of your grace, that he be given
Enough grace for him to lift his eyes
Higher towards the ultimate beatitude.

28 And I, who never burned more for my own vision
Than I do for his, I offer all my prayers,
And pray that they may not be insufficient;

31 That you may disencumber him of all
Clouds of mortality, with your own prayers,
So that the supreme pleasure may unfold.

34 Also I pray you, queen, who can do anything
You choose to do: after this great vision
Enable him to keep his affections sane.

37 May your protection extinguish human impulses:
See Beatrice, with how many of the blessed,
Putting her hands together for my prayer!

40 The eyes beloved and venerated of God,
Fixed on the praying saint, made evident
How pleasing to her are devoted prayers;

43 Then they turned upwards to the eternal light
In which it is not to be thought that any
Creature's eye else would have found its way so clearly.

46 And I, who was drawing near the end
Of all desires, felt as I must do
The ardour of desire in me finished.

49 Bernard indicated I might look up,
And smiled at me; but I was already
Of my own motion as he would have me be;

For my sight, becoming clarified,
Entered deeper and deeper through the ray
Of that profound light which is true in itself.

From that moment what I saw was greater
Than our language, which falls at such a prospect,
As memory fails at something so out of its way.

As someone who sees something in his sleep
And after his dream has only an impression
Of what he felt, and can recall nothing else,

So am I, for my vision has almost gone,
And yet into my heart still, drop by drop,
Flows the sweetness which was born of it.

So the snow loses its shape in the sun;
So was it that the oracles of the Sibyl,
On the light leaves, were lost in the wind.

O supreme light who rise far above
Mortal notions, lend my memory
A little of what then appeared to me,

And give my tongue all the power it needs
So that a single spark of your glory
May be transmitted to people in the future;

For, if something of it comes back to my mind
And sounds a little in these verses of mine,
Your triumph will more easily be conceived.

I think I should have been quite bewildered
In the intensity of the living ray
If my eyes had been turned away from it.

And I remember that I was the bolder
To bear the rays, as long as my sight
Had intercourse with the infinite power.

O abundant grace, trusting whom I presumed
To fix my gaze through the eternal light
Until I had seen all that I could see!

85 I saw gathered there in the depths of it,
Bound up by love into a single volume,
All the leaves scattered through the universe;

88 Substance and accidents and their relations,
But yet fused together in such a manner
That what I am talking of is a simple light.

91 The universal form of this knot
Is what I think I saw, because when I say that
I feel that my gladness becomes more ample.

94 A single moment cost me more forgetfulness
Than twenty-five centuries have the enterprise
Which made Neptune marvel at the sight of Argo.

97 So my mind, held in complete suspense,
Gazed fixedly, motionless and intent,
And always as if on fire with the gazing.

100 In that light a man becomes such
That it is impossible he should turn away
Ever to look upon any other thing.

103 Because the good, which is the object of the will,
Is there in its entirety; and outside it
There is some defect in what there is perfect.

106 My language now will be more inadequate,
Even for what I remember, than would that
Of a child still bathing his tongue at the breast.

109 Not that there was more than a simple appearance
In the living light which I gazed upon
And which is always as it always has been;

112 It was my sight which was growing stronger
As I was looking: so what looked like one
Worked on me as I myself changed.

115 In the profundity of the clear substance
Of the deep light, appeared to me three circles
Of three colours and equal circumference;

And the first seemed to be reflected by the second,
As a rainbow by a rainbow, and the third
Seemed like a flame breathed equally from both.

121 O how my speech falls short, how faint it is
For my conception! And for what I saw
It is not enough to say that I say little.

124 Eternal light, existing in yourself alone,
Alone knowing yourself; and who, known to yourself
And knowing, love and smile upon yourself!

127 That circle which, conceived in this manner,
Appeared in you as a reflected light,
When my eyes examined it rather more,

130 Within itself, and in its own colour,
Seemed to be painted with our effigy;
And so absorbed my attention altogether.

133 Like a geometer who sets himself
To square the circle, and is unable to think
Of the formula he needs to solve the problem,

136 So was I faced with this new vision:
I wanted to see how the image could fit the circle
And how it could be that that was where it was;

139 But that was not a flight for my wings:
Except that my mind was struck by a flash
In which what it desired came to it.

142 At this point high imagination failed;
But already my desire and my will
Were being turned like a wheel, all at one speed,

145 By the love which moves the sun and the other stars.