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THE COMEDY  
OF  
DANTE ALIGHIERI  
THE FLORENTINE

★

CANTICA III  
PARADISE  
〈IL PARADISO〉

★

TRANSLATED BY  
DOROTHY L. SAYERS  
AND  
BARBARA REYNOLDS



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trass of Christ. In *Hebrews* xi. 31 it is said of her: "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." And St James (iii, 25): "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?"

ll. 118-20: "*your earth's cast cone of shade*": It was formerly calculated that the cone of shadow cast by the earth extended as far as the heaven, or sphere, of Venus (not to the planet itself, the distance of which from the earth was known to vary greatly). It is known now that the earth's shadow extends about 1½ million kilometres, and that the smallest distance between Venus and the earth is about fifty million kilometres.

l. 119: "... *the triumph of Christ's arms*": This is a reference to the victory of Christ over the powers of Hell when He descended to the Limbo and drew forth the souls of patriarchs, etc. (cf. *Inf.* iv. 56-63).

l. 123: "... *those extended palms*": i.e. the hands of Christ outstretched upon the Cross.

l. 126: "*Now by this Pope forgotten and disdained*": Pope Boniface VIII, preoccupied with strengthening his position in Europe, neglected his duty to liberate the Holy Land from the Infidel. The same reproach, more forcefully expressed, was uttered by Guido da Montefeltro in *Inf.* xxvii. 85-90:

"But he, the Prince of the modern Pharisees,  
Having a war to wage by Lateran -  
Not against Jews, nor Moslem enemies,

For every foe he had was Christian,  
Not one had marched on Acre, none had bought  
Or sold within the realm of the Soldan - "

Acre, the last stronghold remaining to the Christians in Palestine after the Crusades, was retaken by the Saracens in 1291, and no attempt had been made to regain it.

ll. 127-30: In this terrible indictment against Florence, Foulquet says she is sprung from the Devil, and from such evil plant the florin is produced which, stamped with the fleur-de-lis, became the standard currency of Italy.

l. 135: "*the Decretals*": These are the Papal decrees of monetary gains, the books of Canon Law, which prove more productive than the Gospels or the writings of the Church fathers.

ll. 136-42: Foulquet's discourse ends on a note of general remonstrance to the Papacy and cardinalate for their greed for wealth and their neglect of the true spirit of Christianity. He reiterates in the last line the prophecy of retribution soon to overtake the Church, a prophecy which occurs at intervals throughout the *Divine Comedy*.

## CANTO X

THE STORY. Dante and Beatrice ascend to the heaven of the Sun, leaving below them the spheres which are tinged with the shadow cast by the earth. Outlined against the brightness of the sun are spirits characterized by the gift of wisdom. Forming a circle of twelve lights and revolving three times round Dante and Beatrice, they utter music so ineffable that it cannot be described on earth. A speaker, identifying himself as St Thomas Aquinas, tells Dante the names of the other eleven souls.

The uncreated Might which passeth speech,  
Gazing on His Begotten with the Love  
That breathes Itself eternally from each,

All things that turn through mind and space made move 4  
In such great order that without some feel  
Of Him none e'er beheld the frame thereof.

Look up with me, then, Reader, to the reel 7  
The exalted heavens tread, and scan that part  
Where one wheel crosses with the other wheel;

There gaze enamoured on the Master's art, 10  
Whence never He removes the eye of Him,  
Such is the love He bears it in His heart.

Observe how, branching off as from a stem, 13  
Runs slant the circle that the planets ride,  
To meet the calls that the world makes on them;

For were their path not tilted thus aside, 16  
Much heavenly power would go for naught, and nigh  
All earthly potencies unborn had died;

While more or less than this if it should lie 19  
Out of the straight, 'twould cause a grievous lack  
Of order in the low world and the high.

Bide on thy bench now, Reader, and think back 22  
Upon this foretaste, if the feast in store  
Thou wouldst enjoy ere relish tire and slack;

- 25 I've served it up, and I can do no more.  
Pray help thyself; the theme I have to rhyme  
Is one I need my whole attention for.
- 28 Of Nature's ministers the chief and prime,  
Who sets on earth the seals of heavenly sway,  
And makes his light the measure of our time,
- 31 Had reached that point we named, and on his way  
Through heav'n was moving up the spiral stair  
Whereon he shows him earlier day by day.
- 34 And I was with him, but no more aware  
Of my ascent than as a man may know,  
Ere a thought strikes him, that a thought is there.
- 37 'Tis she, Beatrice, she that wafteth so  
From good to better, with a flight so keen,  
The act is done ere time has time to flow.
- 40 How bright in its own right must that have been,  
Which light, not colour, outlined on the light  
Of the sun's self, when there I entered in!
- 43 Call on experience, genius, art, I might,  
But paint imaginable picture, none;  
Yet trust we may, and long to see that sight;
- 46 And if imagination cannot run  
To heights like these, no wonder: no eye yet  
E'er braved a brilliance that outshone the sun.
- 49 But such was God's fourth family, there set  
In endless joy, bathed by the Father's rays,  
Which show them how He breathes and doth beget.
- 52 Beatrice then began: "Give thanks, give praise  
Now to the Sun of Angels, that to this,  
The visible sun, hath raised thee by His grace!"
- 55 Ne'er was man's heart with such great eagerness  
Devoutly moved to make his whole self over  
To God, with all the will that in him is,
- 58 Than at those words was I; I grew God's lover  
So wholly, needs must Beatrix' self admit  
Eclipse, and I became oblivious of her.

- But this displeased her not; she smiled at it,  
So that the splendour of her laughing eyes  
From one to many things recalled my wit. 61
- Lo! many surpassing lights in a bright device,  
We at the centre, they as a wreath, were shown,  
And sweeter of voice they were than bright of guise. 64
- So girdled round we now and again have known  
Latona's daughter, when the teeming air  
Catches and holds the threads that weave her zone. 67
- Those heavenly courts I've stood in, treasure there  
Many rich gems, too precious, being unique,  
To be removed out of the kingdom's care; 70
- Such were those fiery carols - they who seek  
To hear them must find wings to reach that goal,  
Or wait for tidings till the dumb shall speak. 73
- So carolling, that ardent aureole  
Of suns swung round us thrice their burning train,  
As neighbouring stars swing round the steady pole; 76
- Then seemed like ladies, from the dancing chain  
Not loosed, but silent at the measure's close,  
Listening alert to catch the next new strain. 79
- Now from within one fire a voice arose:  
"Since grace - whose radiance, wheresoe'er extended,  
Kindles true love, and thus by loving grows, 82
- Still multiplied in thee shines forth so splendid  
As up that stair to lead thee, whence none ever,  
Except to re-ascend it, hath descended, 85
- He that should seal his flask up, nor deliver  
Wine to assuage thy thirst, were no more free  
Than, from the sea damned back, a running river. 88
- What flowers, thou askest, deck this garlandry  
Circling the Lady, and with joy surveying  
Her beauty, who for Heav'n doth strengthen thee. 91
- Lamb of the holy flock was I, obeying  
Dominic on that road he led us by,  
Where is good fattening if there be no straying. 94

- 97 Brother to me and master, one stands nigh  
On my right hand here: Albert of Cologne  
Was he, and Thomas of Aquino, I.
- 100 Wouldst learn the rest? Then let thy sight be thrown  
Behind my speech, till right around we've sought  
The sacred wreath, and all are named and known.
- 103 Next flames the light of Gratian's smile, who taught  
In either forum, and in both gives pleasure  
To Paradise, by the good work he wrought.
- 106 That Peter next adorns our choir, in measure  
Generous as she whose widowed means were small,  
On Holy Church bestowing all his treasure.
- 109 The fifth light yonder, brightest of us all,  
So breathes out love that every man on ground  
Thirsts for his news; that mind majestic
- 112 There dwells, in whom such wisdom did abound,  
None ever rose in any generation,  
If truth speak true, to insight so profound.
- 115 Next him, that cerge sheds forth illumination  
Who in his mortal flesh right well discerned  
Angelic natures and their ministration.
- 118 Laughs in yon flamelet, with his ardour burned,  
That pleader for the Christian age, whose learning  
Provided lore from which Augustine learned.
- 121 Now, if thy mind's eye has been duly turning  
From light to light, as I pronounced their praises,  
'Tis on the eighth thou fixest now thy yearning;
- 124 There on the total good enraptured gazes  
That joy who strips the world's hypocrisies  
Bare to whoever heeds his cogent phrases;
- 127 The flesh they rest him from, Cioldoro sees  
At rest in earth; himself came forth from sore  
Exile and martyrdom unto this peace.
- 130 There flames the glowing breath of Isidore,  
Bede, and that Richard who was wont to be  
In speculation not a man, but more.

- This fire, from whom thy glance returns to me,  
Shines from a spirit grave in thought, who knew  
Sorrow; for him death came too tardily; 133
- That's the eternal light of Sigier, who,  
Lecturing down in Straw Street, hammered home  
Invidious truths, as logic taught him to." 136
- Then, like the horloge, calling us to come,  
What time the Bride of God doth rise and sing,  
Wooing His love, her mattins to her Groom, 139
- Where part with part will push and pull, and ring,  
Ding-ding, upon the bell sweet notes that swell  
With love the soul made apt for worshipping, 142
- E'en so I saw it move, the glorious wheel,  
And voice with voice harmonious change and chime  
Sweetness unknown, there only knowable 145
- Where ever-present joy knows naught of time. 148

THE IMAGES. *The Sun*: In the *story*, the sun, which in the Ptolemaic system was the fourth of the seven planets circling the earth, is the next stage in the ascent after Venus. In the *allegory*, the sun is the symbol of intellectual illumination and, ultimately, of God Himself, since the goal of wisdom is knowledge of the Divine Essence.

*The Passage beyond Earth's Shadow*: In the *story*, the passage of Dante and Beatrice beyond the heaven which the "earth's cast cone of shade just touches" (ix. 118-19) marks the completion of the first stage of their ascent. As in the *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, so now in *Paradise*, the tenth Canto constitutes the beginning of another section of the poem. To mark this division, there is a pause in the narrative, and what may be called a new prologue opens the Canto, recalling to our notice the ultimate theme of the whole work: the mystery of the Holy Trinity. In the *allegory*, the ascent beyond sense to the suprasensible symbolizes the progress of the soul in its advance towards knowledge of God, for it is by the illumination of the mind rather than by sense impressions that Dante comes ultimately to know Him.

*The Circle of Twelve Lights*: In the *story*, these are the souls of twelve wise men. With the exception of Solomon, who represents kingly prudence, they are all exponents or doctors of learning, philosophy or theology, men through whom the Word of God was mediated in wisdom to the world. In the *allegory*, the garland of lights, gyrating in celestial dance and uttering music of a sweetness so ineffable it cannot be described on earth, symbolizes the order and harmony in which all the diverse manifestations of God's truth are here conjoined.

NOTES. ll. 1-3: The opening lines of this canto are an expression of the relationship of the Three Persons of the Trinity. The "uncreated Might", God the Father, self-existent, contemplates Himself as manifested, "gazing on His Begotten" in that Love, the Holy Spirit, which in either aspect He breathes forth. The emphasis on "each" is significant, for it faithfully reproduces the prominence Dante gives to the proceeding of the Holy Ghost from the Son as well as from the Father.

ll. 5-6: . . . *that without some feel of Him none e'er beheld the frame thereof*: He who contemplates the order of all that revolves in mind and space cannot but be aware of God.

ll. 7-8: . . . *the reel the exalted heavens tread*: i.e. the revolution of the spheres carrying the planets round the earth.

ll. 8-9: . . . *that part where one wheel crosses with the other wheel*: One wheel is the daily movement of the planets round the earth, and this is parallel to the equator; the other wheel is the annual movement of the sun along the ecliptic (or zodiac) and this is not parallel but oblique to the equator. These two movements cross each other at the first point of Aries (at the spring equinox) and at the first point of Libra (at the autumnal equinox). In its yearly, oblique revolution round the earth, the sun performs a slanting, spiral-like twist or coil, moving from north to south and from south to north, thus bringing about the change of seasons.

l. 14: . . . *runs slant the circle that the planets ride*: The circle that the planets ride is the zodiac, a wide band along which the sun traces its annual path (or ecliptic) and the planets and constellations are seen in constantly changing positions.

l. 16: "*For were their path not tilted thus aside*": If the ecliptic were not inclined to the poles, or if it were tilted *more or less*, the warmth of the sun would be limited to a much more restricted area of the globe.

l. 21: *the low world and the high*: i.e. the northern and southern hemispheres. It is interesting to compare Dante's pleasure in the order of the universe with Milton's impassioned and rhetorical lines (*Paradise Lost*, x. 650 ff.) explaining how that same inclination (which Dante considers providential) was part of the Curse brought about by the Fall, whereas if Eve had left the apple alone, the temperate zone (in which Eden was situated) would have enjoyed "Spring perpetual".

ll. 22-7: These lines indicate that Dante was aware of the difficulty his readers would have in understanding the foregoing astronomical passage. Like a teacher conscious of the syllabus, he presses onward with his main theme, advising the reader to think the problem out further for himself.

l. 28: *Of Nature's ministers the chief and prime*: the sun.

l. 31: *Had reached the point we named*: i.e. the point at which the ecliptic meets the equator. See note to ll. 8-9.

ll. 32-3: . . . *was moving up the spiral stair whereon he shows him earlier day by day*: From winter to summer solstice, the sun follows a spiral-

like course about the earth, rising (for the northern hemisphere) a little earlier each day. After the summer solstice, he begins his downward spiral, moving from north to south, from the tropic of Cancer to the tropic of Capricorn, rising a little later each day. Since he has reached the point mentioned, he is half-way between the winter and the summer solstice, or at the spring equinox.

l. 34: *And I was with him*: Dante has entered the heaven of the sun.

l. 49: *such was God's fourth family*: The fourth group of souls in Heaven, encountered by Dante in the sun, consists of those endowed with wisdom.

l. 51: *how He breathes and doth beget*: The Father begets the Son and in either aspect breathes forth the Spirit (cf. ll. 1-3).

l. 53: *the Sun of Angels*: i.e. God. In the *Convivio* III. xii, Dante said: "No object of sense in the whole world is more worthy to be made a type of God than the sun, which illumines first himself and then all other celestial and elemental bodies with sensible light. So God illumines with intellectual light first Himself and afterwards the dwellers in heaven and all other intellectual beings."

ll. 62-3: "*the splendour of her laughing eyes from one to many things recalled my wit*": Dante, in his eager praise and love of God, was drawn up into the One, from which he is recalled by the reflection ("splendour") of His glory in the many.

l. 68: *Latona's daughter*: Diana, the moon. The circle of light girdling Dante and Beatrice is compared to a halo round the moon.

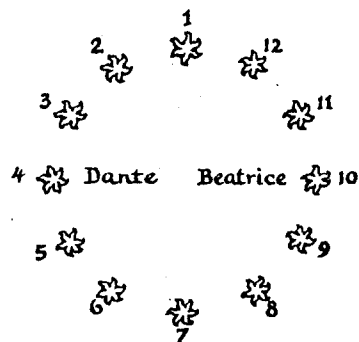
ll. 71-2: . . . *too precious . . . to be removed out of the kingdom's care*: i.e. there are things in Heaven that cannot be described on earth.

l. 78: *as neighbouring stars swing round the steady pole*: This comparison seems to convey that the circle of lights swung horizontally round the central figures (cf. Canto xii. 2).

ll. 79-81: The revolving circle of lights has ceased singing. Dante compares them to a ring of women dancers who, having reached the end of a *ripresa*, continue dancing in silence while their leader sings a stanza, ready to begin singing again when they reach the next *ripresa*.

ll. 94-5: "*Lamb of the holy flock was I, obeying Dominic*": He now names each member of the circle and from his information the diagram on p. 142 is deduced.

St Thomas Aquinas, the most famous of the scholastic theologians and philosophers, was born of noble family (he was kinsman to Louis VIII) at Rocca Sicca near Aquino in Campania. He received his early education at the neighbouring Benedictine Monastery of Monte Cassino (cf. Canto xxii) and at the University of Naples. He entered the Dominican Order as a young man and went to study at Cologne under Albertus Magnus (whose light is next to his). In 1257, he was created a doctor of theology by the Sorbonne, where he acquired a great reputation. He continued lecturing on theology, in Rome and Bologna and again in Paris, and in 1272 he was sent by his religious superiors to organize the



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|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. St Thomas Aquinas        | 7. Orosius               |
| 2. Albertus Magnus          | 8. Boethius              |
| 3. Gratian                  | 9. Isidore of Seville    |
| 4. Peter Lombard            | 10. Bede                 |
| 5. Solomon                  | 11. Richard of St Victor |
| 6. Dionysius the Areopagite | 12. Sigier of Brabant    |

Dominican house of studies in Naples and to teach theology there. During these years he was occupied also with the affairs of the Church and in January 1274 he was summoned by Pope Gregory X to attend the Council of Lyons, which had been called in the hope of uniting the Greek and Latin Churches. He fell ill on the journey and died at a Cistercian monastery on the borders between Campania and Latium.

His most important and influential work is the famous *Summa Theologiae*, in which he attempted to present a summary of "all accessible knowledge, arranged according to the best method, and subordinate to the dictates of the Church". It is an exposition of the teachings of the Church in the light of the philosophy of Aristotle and his Arabian commentators. It is divided into three parts of which the third, which was unfinished at his death, was completed by others in accordance with his design for the work. The first part deals with the nature and attributes of God; the second is concerned mainly with ethics; in the third, Aquinas speaks of the person and work of Christ and of the sacraments.

He also wrote a summary of the Christian faith for the refutation of unbelief (the work known briefly as the *Contra Gentiles*); this is several times referred to by Dante. He wrote as well commentaries on Aristotle's works on ethics, physics, metaphysics, the soul, and on various other Aristotelian treatises. He took part in producing a new translation of Aristotle from the Greek (previous translations having been made from Arabic). There is reason to suppose that this is the translation to which Dante refers in the *Convivio*, when he says: "What Aristotle may have

said about it (i.e. the galaxy) cannot be accurately known, because the two translations give different accounts of his opinion. And I think that any mistake may have been due to the translators, for in the New Translation (i.e. probably *St Thomas's*) he is made to say that the galaxy is a congregation, under the stars of this part of the heaven, of the vapours which are always being attracted by them, and this opinion does not appear to be right. In the Old Translation he says that the galaxy is nothing but a multitude of fixed stars in that region . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Dante was deeply indebted to the writings of Aquinas, especially to the *Summa Theologiae*, which, although he never quotes it by name, is the source of many of his discussions of ethics and the soul.<sup>2</sup> He was not, however, exclusively dominated by him and in some respects, notably in regard to the question of free will, he seems to owe more to St Thomas's master, Albertus Magnus. Something of the personality and manner of lecturing of St Thomas seems to be reflected in Canto xi in the careful distinctions he draws at the beginning and the end, and later elaborates in Canto xiii. "By the time Dante studied in Paris, probably in the earlier years of his exile, more than thirty years had passed since Aquinas had lectured there; but there would still be many from whom Dante could gather, and would be eager to gather, reminiscences of 'the Ox of Knowledge' who, in his books, was Dante's greatest teacher and had in Dante his greatest pupil." Sinclair. See also Kenelm Foster, *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Longmans, Green, 1957).

1. 98: *Albert of Cologne*: This is Albertus Magnus, the Master of Aquinas, who was called the Universal Doctor on account of his vast learning. Born in Swabia towards the end of the twelfth century, he entered the Dominican Order and studied theology at Padua, Paris and Bologna, and later lectured at Cologne and elsewhere in Germany. It was at Cologne, where the Order had a house, that Thomas Aquinas studied under him. Together they went to Paris in 1245, where Albertus received his doctorate, returning together to Cologne three years later. (This companionship is reflected in St Thomas's words, "Brother to me and master".) In 1260, he was appointed Bishop of Ratisbon by Pope Alexander IV. He died at Cologne, on the 15 November 1280, at the age of eighty-seven.

He was an even more voluminous writer than his pupil, Thomas Aquinas. When his collected works were printed in Lyons in 1651, they filled twenty-one folio volumes. Six of these are devoted to commentaries on Aristotle, five to Biblical commentary, two on Dionysius the Areopagite (cf. l. 115), three on the *Liber Sententiarum* by Peter Lombard (cf. l. 106); the remaining five contain his *Summa Theologiae*, his *Summa de Creaturis*, a treatise on the Virgin, and various scientific works, includ-

1. *Convivio* II. xv.
2. See Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Divine Poet and the Angelic Doctor" in *Further Papers on Dante* (Methuen, 1957, pp. 38-52). This was originally a paper read to the Aquinas Society in 1946.

ing one on alchemy. He seems to have been much interested in what might be called - with all due allowance for the difference implied by modern use of the phrase - experimental science. In his writings he distinguishes carefully between what he had only read and what he had personally seen. Having read, for instance, that the eagle laid only one egg, he arranged for a man to be lowered over a cliff on a rope to look at an eagle's nest and count the contents. He qualified statements which he repeated from others by such *caveats* as "I don't think this is true" or confirmed by such corroboration as "my colleagues and I tried this out". When Beatrice (in Canto ii. 95-6) speaks of experiment as "that source whence all your science has to start", she is quoting Albertus Magnus.

l. 103: *the light of Gratian's smile*: Gratian, the founder of the science of Canon Law, was born towards the end of the eleventh century, either at Chiusi in Tuscany or at Carraria, near Orvieto. He is said to have become a Benedictine and to have entered the Camaldulian monastery at Classe, near Ravenna, whence he transferred to that of San Felice at Bologna. His famous work known as the *Decretum Gratiani*, published between 1140 and 1150, is a *concordia*, or reconciliation, between the laws of the ecclesiastical and secular courts. That is why St Thomas says of him: "he taught in either forum (i.e. both the ecclesiastical and the civil courts) and in both gives pleasure to Paradise, by the good work he wrought."

l. 106: "*That Peter next adorns our choir*": This is Peter Lombard, known as the Master of the Sentences, from the title of his work *Sententiarum Libri Quatuor*. He was born near Novara about the year 1100 and studied first at Bologna and then at Paris, where he held a Chair in theology. In 1159, he was appointed Bishop of Paris, but died shortly afterwards, either in 1160 or 1164. He is said to have been a pupil of Abelard and was also, with Richard of St Victor (cf. l. 131), a pupil of the still more celebrated mystic and theologian, Hugh of St Victor (cf. Canto xii). Peter's book of Sentences is primarily a collection of the sayings of the Fathers. They are arranged, like an anthology, under four headings or subjects, the Godhead, creation, the incarnation, and the sacraments. The ethical principle is predominant and reconciliation of conflicting authorities is the principal criterion of selection. It became a text-book in the schools of theology and the subject of a great many commentaries.

ll. 107-8: "*generous as she whose widowed means were small, On Holy Church bestowing all his treasure*": At the beginning of his work, Peter Lombard offers it humbly as a modest tribute to the Holy Church, as the poor widow offered her mite (cf. *Luke*, xxi. 1-4). Dante quotes his definition of hope in Canto xxv. 67-9.

l. 109-14: "*The fifth light yonder*" etc.: This is the soul of Solomon. His inclusion in the circle is remarkable on two counts. First, the question as to whether Solomon was saved or damned was in dispute among the theologians; hence, everyone on earth "thirsts for his news" (ll. 110-

11). Tertullian, St Cyprian, St Augustine, and even Dante's friend and master, Brunetto Latini, had said that Solomon was damned, partly on grounds of idolatry, partly also owing to interpretations of the *Song of Songs*. The more modern theologians of Dante's time inclined to the belief that he had repented and been saved, certain leaden tablets (subsequently proved spurious) having been discovered at Granada, with a verse in Arabic characters (attributed to St James) which stated that Solomon turned from his sinfulness and was forgiven. The second, and more difficult, point concerning his presence here is the nature of his wisdom. St Thomas, in ll. 111-14, calls him:

...; "that mind majestic,

... , in whom such wisdom did abound,  
None ever rose in any generation,  
If truth speak true, to insight so profound."

This is so difficult a saying that almost an entire canto is devoted to its elucidation (cf. Canto xiii. 34-108). St Thomas is here quoting God's words as related in *I Kings*, iii. 5-13: "I have given thee a wise and understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise (*post te surrectus sit*) like unto thee." St Thomas's later explanation is, in fact, a gloss on this passage (see Canto xiii. 93 ff., and notes). For the present, he is content with an indirect reference to its source; "if truth speak true", which is to say, if the Bible does not err, which it cannot, being the truth; any error concerning it arises from our misunderstanding.

There remains the question as to why Solomon is included in the circles of the Doctors of the Active Life. His is the wisdom of kings, not of learning, and it would seem that Dante wished to emphasize the relationship between them. This is characteristic of Dante's preoccupation with justice and government and it is significant that it is a phrase from the *Book of the Wisdom of Solomon* which the souls form in the Heaven of the Just before the transformation of the letter M into the emblem of the Eagle. (See also Canto xiv, under *Images*.)

l. 115: "*that cerge sends forth illumination*": Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian who was converted by the preaching of St Paul (*Acts*, xvii. 34) was believed in the Middle Ages to be the author of a work on the Angelic orders (cf. Canto xxviii. 130-32 and note.)

l. 119: "*that pleader for the Christian age*": This is Paulus Orosius, whose principal work, *Historiae adversum paganos*, is intended to prove by the evidence of history that the world had not deteriorated since the adoption of Christianity, as the pagans asserted. Dante owed much of his knowledge of ancient history to Orosius, whom he cites on several occasions.

l. 125: "*that joy who strips the world's hypocisies*": (Boethius), the fifth-century Roman statesman and philosopher (A.D. c. 475-525), was the



author of an allegorical work, *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, which he wrote in prison in Pavia. He had previously held high honour under the Emperor Theodoric, who in his old age allowed himself to be influenced by jealous courtiers and had Boethius cast into prison on suspicion of treason and finally put to death with cruel torture. In his work, Boethius represents philosophy as a gracious and beautiful woman with whom he holds converse and who speaks to him of the mutability of fortune and the insecurity of everything except virtue. Dante was very familiar with this work which, he says, together with Cicero's *De Amicitia*, provided him with his greatest consolation after the death of Beatrice.

In his fate, Boethius is a type, like Pier delle Vigne and like Romèo, of the faithful minister who is unjustly suspected of disloyalty and is shabbily or even cruelly treated by those he has served. It is a type in which Dante recognized something of his own vicissitudes. When his ancestor Caociaguuda speaks to him in the Heaven of Mars, he echoes St Thomas's words about martyrdom and the peace of Heaven to which Boethius escaped from the deception of the world (cf. Canto xv. 145-8).

l. 127: *Cieldoro*: Boethius was buried in the Church of St Peter in Ciel d'Oro at Pavia.

l. 130: "*the glowing breath of Isidore*": St Isidore of Seville was born about 560 and died in 636. His chief work was a massive encyclopaedia of scientific knowledge, entitled *Origines*, on which Brunetto Latini based much of his *Trésor*.

l. 131: *Bede*: The Venerable Bede (about 673-735) is the author of the *Ecclesiastical History of England*. In one of his Latin epistles, Dante reproaches the Italian cardinals for neglecting the works of Bede, as well as those of Gregory the Great, St Ambrose, St Augustine, Dionysius, John of Damascus, in preference for the works of the Decretalists in their pursuit of temporal interests. The authors they neglect "sought after God as their end and highest good", while the Cardinals "get for themselves riches and benefices".<sup>1</sup>

ll. 131-2: "*that Richard who was wont to be in speculation not a man, but more*": Richard of St Victor, said to have been a native of Scotland, was a mystic of the twelfth century. With Peter Lombard, he studied in Paris under Hugh of St Victor and was a friend of St Bernard of Clairvaux. His works, which are quoted by St Thomas, consist of commentaries on parts of the Old Testament, St Paul's Epistles and on the Apocalypse, as well as works on mystical contemplation, which earned him the title of "Magnus Contemplator". It has been said that the mystical writings of Richard are a scientific attempt to systematize the facts of the contemplative life. It is interesting to notice that in the original Italian, Dante does not use the verb "contemplare" in connection with Richard, but, instead, the verb "considerare". We have not yet reached the heaven of

1. *The Letters of Dante*, edited and translated by Paget Toynbee, Oxford (Clarendon Press), 1920, No. viii. p. 145.

the contemplatives, and it would seem from this choice of word that Dante did not include Richard among them. The following passage from Dom C. Butler's *Western Mysticism* suggests why: "Contemplation is concerned with the certainty of things, consideration with their investigation. Accordingly, contemplation may be defined as the soul's true and certain intuition of a thing, or as the unhesitating apprehension of truth. Consideration is thought earnestly directed to investigation or the application of the mind searching for the truth (the modern 'meditation')".<sup>1</sup> Consideration, thus defined, is more appropriate than contemplation to the circle of the Doctors. The writings of Richard of St Victor had a considerable influence on Dante, not only in the Leah and Rachel allegory (cf. *Purg.* xxvii, *Images*) but also in the image of the Mountain. "Richard does not ascend to God by the way of negation. His 'dark night of unknowing' occurs at the end of a progressive affirmative system of experimental and acquired spiritual knowledge. . . . It is only in the last stages of contemplation that the soul, according to Richard, is passive and all is received from God." (Clare Kirchberger, Richard of St Victor, *Benjamin Minor*, Faber and Faber.)

ll. 136: "*the eternal light of Sigier*": Sigier of Brabant was a doctor of philosophy in the University of Paris in the thirteenth century. His position beside St Thomas, on his left, is the most striking juxtaposition in the circle. St Thomas and Sigier had been opponents on earth in the dispute that arose in the University of Paris concerning the expounding of Aristotle in the light of the commentary by Averroës. In 1269, St Thomas was sent to Paris for two years to preach against the Averroist doctrine. He found Sigier lecturing (in the Rue du Fouarre, or Straw Street, according to tradition) to the Arts Faculty, members of which, both lecturers and students, were mostly laymen, who asserted their right to study Averroës irrespective of the disapproval of the theologians. In 1270, both Aquinas and Sigier published manifestoes about a particular point in Averroist doctrine, and Aquinas publicly refuted the practice of those who "study philosophy and who say things which are not true according to the Faith; and when it is pointed out to them that this is repugnant to the Faith, they reply that this is what the Philosopher<sup>2</sup> says; they themselves, they say, do not affirm it; they are merely repeating the words of the Philosopher." By 1275 the whole University of Paris was in an uproar and the Papal Legate, Simon de Brion (who later became Pope Martin IV), went so far as to threaten the leaders of the factions with "the sword of justice and of vengeance". Sigier left Paris and retired to Liège, but in 1277 he was summoned to appear before the inspector-general of the faith for France on a charge of heresy. According to one tradition, Sigier was later executed by order of the Court of Rome at Orvieto, not, evidently, for heresy, for which the punishment was death by burning, but for a political offence. It is known that Sigier took an active part in political as

1. p. 148.

2. i.e. Aristotle.

well as religious disputes and controversies. He would probably not have favoured the temporal claims of the Papacy, and may well have incurred the animosity of the Papal Court on this account. According to another tradition, he was murdered by his servant.

Whatever the reasons for his death, there was a well-established tradition that his life was sorrowful. An Italian imitation of the *Roman de la Rose* (*Il Fiore*), written in a series of sonnets towards the end of the thirteenth century by a poet named Durante (who has been by some scholars identified with Dante himself), contains a reference to his suffering and to his death by the sword. Dante, in l. 138, appears to sum up the situation in the phrase "invidious truths", truths, that is, which Sigier taught and which brought him hatred.

That St Thomas should now say that Sigier taught truths, when in the first life he opposed him for propagating falsehoods, is paradoxical indeed. It is impossible that Dante should be making St Thomas eat his words as regards Averroism. The explanation probably lies in the plural use of "truth". It is not the *truth* which Sigier taught, but truths as he saw them and deduced them according to logic. As such, they claimed his intellectual integrity, "that rare and radiant virtue, the scholar's honour".<sup>1</sup>

The overriding and compelling pattern revealed in the choice of souls who form the first circle of the wise is one of reconciliation. Some explicitly (Albertus Magnus, St Thomas Aquinas, Gratian, Peter Lombard), and others implicitly (Dionysius and Boethius), still others by refutation of error and the establishment of verifiable fact (Orosius, Isidore and Bede), and Solomon by the application of his faculty of discernment to the problems of judging between right and wrong, devoted their intellectual powers to the pursuit of the one indivisible Truth of God among the many and various and often conflicting truths of men.

l. 140: *what time the Bride of God doth rise and sing*: i.e. at the hour when Church mattins are sung.

ll. 142-3: *Where part with part will push and pull, and ring, ding-ding, upon the bell sweet notes*: The movement of the circle of souls (l. 145) is compared to the multiple mechanism of a chiming clock, for as it moves it sings, just as the revolving wheels of a chiming clock release a hammer which plays on a series of bells (cf. Canto xxiv. 13-15 and note).

ll. 143-4: *notes that swell with love the soul made apt for worshipping*: The original metaphor, "che il ben disposto spirto d'amor turge" is an erotic one, which an archaic meaning of the word "apt" conveys (cf. *Timon of Athens*:

... she is young and apt:  
Our own precedent passions so instruct us  
What levity's in youth).

1. Channing-Pearce, *The Terrible Crystal*, p. xv. For further discussion of Dante's conception of Sigier of Brabant, see E. Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*.

## CANTO XI

THE STORY. Still in the Heaven of the Sun, Dante listens again to the voice of St Thomas Aquinas, who explains the meaning of certain words he has used in the preceding canto. His explanation leads him to relate the wondrous love of St Francis for the Lady Poverty.

- O imbecile ambition of mortality!  
What ill-directed reasonings syllogistical  
Weight down thy wings to mundane triviality!
- Chasing juridical or aphoristical 4  
Successes, church preferments, domination  
By any methods, brutal or sophistical,
- One bent on commerce, one on spoliation, 7  
Another fagging at his carnal pleasure,  
Entoiled, one sprawled in idle dissipation -
- There they all were; while I, at blessed leisure 10  
From all these cares, at Beatrice's side  
Enjoyed Heav'n's welcome in right glorious measure.
- When to the point he first had occupied 13  
Each light upon the circle came once more,  
They bode, as candles on their prickets bide;
- And from that one which spake to me before 16  
I saw a smile light up within, and blaze  
More radiant yet from out his flaming core:
- "Even as I shine, resplendent with His rays, 19  
So, as I contemplate the Light eterne,  
I see what hidden doubts thy mind amaze.
- Thou art perplexed, and gladly wouldst thou learn 22  
My meaning, in as explicit and plain  
Terms as thy understanding may discern,
- When I said: *Where's good fattening*, and again, 25  
*None ever rose* - which latter will involve  
A nice distinction, subtle to maintain.