

Dante loved learning and spoke of Philosophy as a knight might speak of his lady ; so that he had especial reverence for those who devoted their lives and their gifts to its service.

He shows us the illustrious spirits who dwell in the Fourth Heaven, the Heaven of the Sun ; and so intent upon his task is he, and so absorbed in his desire, that the leader may grasp his description that he interrupts himself to say,

"Now rest thee, reader ! on this bench and muse  
Anticipative of the feast to come :  
So shall delight make thee not feel thy toil."

Then he goes on to describe how, encircling Beatrice and himself like a wreath, was a ring of Twelve blessed spirits, the souls of devout scholars. Amongst them are Solomon the Wise, the famous King of Israel and Judah ; Dionysius, the Areopagite, a professor of Philosophy at Athens, who was converted by the preaching of S. Paul and became his disciple ; Boëthius, the last of the Roman philosophers ;<sup>1</sup> the Venerable Bede of England, and other saintly men. Amongst them was the favourite pupil of Albertus Magnus, the learned Thomas Aquinas, known as the "Angelic Doctor." He is described as explaining to Dante the presences in the mysterious ring ; and, himself a Dominican, pronouncing the eulogy upon S. Francis of Assisi, the twelfth glowing light in the circle. Dante ends his Book of the Paradiso with this vision of the blessed spirits who abide in the Light of God, but cannot interpret all that he is vouchsafed to perceive : "To the high fantasy here power failed ; but already my desire and will were rolled—even as a wheel which moveth equally—by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ch. xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Dent's "Temple Classics" Dante : Mr Wicksteed's translation.