

At this point Sordello feels himself endowed with a new power of penetrating the mysteries of things. He sees that good and evil are mere modes of time ; they have no absolute reality. Evil exists in this world in order that the soul may develop itself in the struggle to overcome evil, and may thus be prepared for a new and higher phase of being. The soul, being eternal, has infinite desires and aspirations which this finite world cannot gratify. Sordello had made the mistake of trying to satisfy these infinite aspirations within the limits of this life. He had attempted to get more out of this world than the world can yield. He had thus wrecked himself—lost, in a great measure, the advantages which the present life is intended to afford. This fatal mistake, however, arose from his very superiority to other men,—from the depth of his insight and the breadth of his nature. Must then a man of his type degrade his soul to the pursuit of objects which, he perceives, are unworthy of it ; or where is a motive to be found sufficient to bring spirits like his into harmony with the present world of time ? Sordello finds no solution for the difficulty ; but an instinctive feeling of right, although he can assign no sufficient motive, leads him to reject the Emperor's badge. He sacrifices himself to the people, and then dies, exhausted by the intensity of the internal struggle.

Such, in brief, is the story of Sordello. His life, says Browning, was a failure, through which not only Sordello suffered, but also the world at large.

“ What he should have been,

Could be and was not—the one step too mean  
For him to take—we suffer at this day  
Because of : Ecelin had pushed away  
Its chance ere Dante could arrive and take  
That step Sordell · spurned, for the world's sake:  
He did much—but Sordello's chance was gone.

\* \* \* \* \*

Had he embraced

Their cause then, men had plucked Hesperian fruit  
And, praising that, just thrown him in to boot  
All he was anxious to appear, but scarce  
Solicitous to be. A sorry farce  
Such life is, after all !