

The deplorable condition of Italy he accounts for largely by the confusion of the temporal and spiritual powers, and he seems chiefly to blame the papal see (xvi., 100). At last the angel's wing touches his brow, and another letter is effaced.

4. The fourth sin in order is that of indifference or sloth. The latter is the term generally employed in devotional books. But, etymologically and otherwise considered, the other is better. The Latin *acidia* is but a transliteration of the Greek word *ἀκηδία*. It signifies lukewarmness, lack of zeal, and sluggishness in good works. As already pointed out, this evil stands midway between the two groups of three on either side of it. The first three—pride, envy and anger—are sins against love. The last three—avarice, gluttony, sensuality—are forms of misplaced love, seeking happiness in earthly things, using them either unlawfully or excessively. Virgil declares that this sin of indifference arises from defect of love. In a very interesting passage (xvii., 90) he points out that love is the principle of all action, and so is the source of good and evil. It is the germ, he says,

"Of each virtue in ye,
And of each act, no less, that merits pain."

This subject is pursued at great length, and much high, mystical converse follows (xviii.) on the nature of love and the good. The love of the good, Virgil says, is innate, and therefore is in itself neither reprehensible nor meritorious. Love finds its full rest in the possession of the good. But there is danger of counterfeit good being sought, instead of the true good; and it is the business of conscience to select an object—to adjust the motives to the will—so as to further the supreme good of the spirit. This selection determines the moral character of our actions.

Soon they are overtaken by a crowd (xviii., 96). Two of these recite examples of zeal guided by love, like "Blessed Mary," who "sought with haste the hilly region," while, at this mention,

"O tarry not, away,"
The others shouted; "let not time be lost
Thro' slackness of affection. Hearty zeal
To serve reanimates celestial grace."

It is remarkable of the Purgatorio, as distinguished from the Inferno and Paradiso, that Dante is frequently falling into slumber. Various explanations have been attempted. Perhaps it may be intended to remind us that the whole is a vision; or perhaps to suggest that, in the process of purification, we are in danger of falling into a lethargy from which we need to be aroused by the agents of Grace. Perhaps it may be meant to recognize the office of repose in effort. "So He giveth His beloved sleep."

5. The next stage brings to the place where avarice and prodigality are purged. These are the two extremes of excess and defect in spending, the mean being liberality. As they pass onwards to this terrace they heard voices singing: "Beati qui lugent—Blessed are they that mourn," and another letter is blotted out.

As they enter this department Dante sees
"A race on the ground,
My soul hath cleaved to the dust," I heard
With sighs so deep, they well-nigh choked the words."

Here are persons who are not mere misers, but those in whom the regenerate life has been

choked and encumbered by love of money, and who are struggling to free themselves of the evil. Among them was Hadrian V., who was Pope for only one month and during that time learned "at once the dream and cozenage of life." Dante describes their sufferings. Next examples of poverty are sung by Hugh Capet, who laments over the errors, in respect of money, committed by many of his royal descendants. At the close of his recitation, the mountain trembles and voices on all sides sing: "Gloria in excelsis Deo." It is the rejoicing at the completed purification of a soul.

Here they are joined by Statius, author of the Thebaid, who had been converted to Christianity, but had not confessed it in his lifetime, for which cause he has a longer period in Purgatory. He tells Dante how much, as a poet, he owed to the Mantuan, not knowing that Virgil is present. The mutual delight of the poets follows the recognition. Statius is said to be the symbol of the moral power inherent in genius—perhaps, we might say, regenerate and purified genius as distinguished from heathen genius in Virgil. The latter expressed his surprise that Statius "midst such ample store of wisdom," should be found among the avaricious. Statius, "somewhat moved to laughter," says he was "too wide of avarice." His fault was prodigality. The fifth letter is now brushed from Dante's brow, whilst the angelic choirs sing out: "Beati esurientes—Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness."

6. They now enter the sixth circle, that of over-eating or gluttony; and soon they come to a tree "with goodly fruitage hung," pleasant to the smell, and watered by a crystal stream. But the penitents are forbidden to taste it. From its leaves a voice is heard:

(xxii., 139) "Mary took more thought
For joy and honor of the nuptial feast
Than for herself, who answers now for you.
The women of old Rome were satisfied
With water for their beverage. Daniel fed
On pulse, and wisdom gained."

As Daniel turned away from the tree he heard a sound of weeping and a prayer: "My lips, O Lord." They came from a crowd of spirits whose eyes were "dark and hollow," and "pale their visage." Their "bones stood staring through the skin." These were gluttons doing penance by fasting. They are praying that those lips and tongues once given to gluttony may now be attuned to utter the praises of God. Whilst the odour from the tree provokes their appetite, they gladly bear the pangs of hunger, which bring solace rather than pain.

By-and-bye they come to another tree grown from a shoot taken from the tree of knowledge. The penitents greatly long for the fruit of this tree; but are told that their wish can be granted only after they have passed through the water of Lethe and entered the terrestrial Paradise. Perfected knowledge is at the end of our discipline. The angel of God now appears and effaces another letter and points the way to the seventh circle.

7. The seventh terrace contains the Incontinent. The transition is described in some beautiful lines, beginning (xxiv. ad fin.)

As when, to harbinger the dawn springs up
On freshened wing the air of May, etc."

We have remarked in Dante the union of tolerance and severity. Here also it is found. Carnal sin is the first in the Inferno

and the last in the Purgatorio, and it is the commonest. Yet Dante knew, as Burns knew and declared, "It hardens all within, and petrifies the feeling," and therefore he passes the incontinent through fires so fierce that, he says,

"I would have cast me into molten glass
To cool me, when I entered; so intense
Raged the confluent mass."

Dante shrinks from entering the fire until Virgil tells him that, although he must suffer, not a hair of his head will perish, and that this lies between him and Beatrice. When, he says, I heard

"The name that springs for ever in my breast,"

then he hesitated no longer. As they mount the stairs they hear voices chanting, "Come ye blessed of My Father." On the way he falls asleep and sees in a dream Leah and Rachel, representatives of the active and the contemplative life, reminding us that not only has the evil of the past to be effaced, but the life must receive positive nourishment and in these two ways.

Virgil now takes leave of Dante saying that he no longer needs his guidance. Human reason and conscience have done their work. "To distrust thy sense," Virgil says, "were henceforth error." His purged eye can now behold the spiritual world as it is. Dante is now purged from his ignorance and weakness, and ascends to the top of the mount of purification, where is the earthly paradise.

As he passes onwards his way lies across a wood through which a crystal stream is flowing. It is Lethe in which the remembrance of sins is to be effaced and his moral freedom restored. On the opposite side he sees a lady, Matilda, the symbol of Christian doctrine and the divine ministry. She explains to him the meaning of Lethe, the river of the forgetfulness of evil, and Eunoe, the river of the remembrance of good, which have a common source.

Here appears a splendid vision of a chariot representing the church, which alone can restore men to Paradise. The chariot is drawn by the Mystic Gryphon, half eagle and half lion, representing Christ. In the chariot is seated Beatrice, representing Divine Wisdom and Grace. Three virgins are on her right—the theological virtues, and four on her left—the cardinal virtues. Four and twenty elders, crowned with lilies go before, representing the Old Testament. The four mystical creatures of Ezekiel come behind, representing the four Gospels. Others came after of uncertain meaning. But it is plain that they are the teachers of the church. On the other side of the stream is Beatrice who proceeds to complete the work of conviction in Dante by reminding him of the sin commemorated by himself in the Vita Nuova. The angels sing: "In Thee, O Lord, have I trusted," and Dante confesses his errors. He then finds himself crossing the water of Lethe, borne up by Matilda, who causes him to drink of the water of oblivion. He is then given into the hands of the seven nymphs.

Dante can now contemplate the history of the church, past and future. The car is fastened to the tree of knowledge which represents the empire, the various trials of the church are represented. Those arising from violence by the eagle, those from heresy by the fox, those from schism by the dragon, those from unlawful union with the world by the harlot and the giant (the King of France,) and the removal