

punishment a series of seven descending circles, each increasing in horror according to the gravity of offences. Over the gate of hell was the dire, but often quoted inscription, "who enter here leave all hope behind," or in the original

"Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch' entrate."

A difficulty met him on the threshold of his epic, namely how to dispose of pagans who had been noted for their virtues, but who, having been born before the Christian dispensation, could not reach the Christian heaven. The subject of the present paper is "the Women of Dante," and to them our attention is confined. In a walled castle therefore, on an emerald plain, and where there was light, in the limbo or first and mildest circle of hell, he places virtuous worshippers of the old gods. There he found Electra, the pious mother of the founder of Troy, Penthesilea, the brave and beautiful queen of the Amazons, who fought for old Priam and was killed by Achilles; Lavinia, persecuted daughter of the old King of Latium, the chaste Lucretia, Marcia, who avenged her husband's death, Julia, daughter of Julius Cæsar, and Cornelia the Roman matron who when asked to exhibit her jewelry proudly showed her two sons as her only treasures. These ladies, in company with the greatest men of antiquity, "majestically moved, and in their post had eminent authority." In one dark and dismal section of the next lower, or second descent were immersed the wantons, Semiramis, Cleopatra, Helen, and Dido, whose parting from Æneas has so often furnished a subject for the painter. In this second circle were, also, alas! those who had loved too well. A rushing wind kept ever whirling the remorseful shades. Here too is laid the touching episode of Francesca di Rimini and her young lover Paolo. Leigh Hunt, in his "Story of Rimini," has amplified the incident with a richness of diction that has made it a classic of the English tongue. The punishment of the lamenting lovers, for broken faith toward husband and brother, was to be perpetually driven by the wind around the circle, never resting until expiation should be made. In reply to a question by the poet, Francesca was permitted to tell her sad tale. (Carey's translation.)

"The land that gave me birth  
Is situate on the coast, where Po descends  
To rest in ocean with its sequent streams.  
Love, that in gentle heart is quickly learned,  
Entangled him by that fair form from me  
Ta'en in such cruel sort as grieves me still.  
Love, that denial takes from none beloved,  
Caught me with pleasing him so passing well,  
That, as thou see'st, he yet deserts me not.  
Love brought us to one death . . . . .  
No greater grief than to remember days  
Of joy, when misery is at hand.  
If thou art bent to know the primal root  
From whence our love got being, I will do  
As one who weeps and tells his tale. One day  
For our delight we read of Lancelot,  
How love him thrall'd. Alone we were and no  
Suspicion near us. Ofttimes by that reading  
Our eyes were drawn together, and the hue  
Fled from our altered cheek. But at one point  
Alone we fell. When of that smile we read,  
The wished smile, so rapturously kissed  
By one so deep in love, then he who ne'er

From me shall separate, at once my lips  
All trembling kissed. The book and writer both  
Were love's purveyors. In its leaves  
That day we read no more."

It is noticeable that in no deeper circle was any woman found, excepting a sorceress in the seventh pit. The crimes of the age, murder, public peculation, simony, usury, treason were not such as the sex are addicted to, and even the prison for scandal had no female occupant, which shows that in the poet's time ladies' tongues were no more given to retailing scandals than they are at the present day.

The gloomy visions of the underworld having been got through with Dante and Virgil his guide

"Climbed,  
Till on the view the beautiful lights of heaven  
Dawned through a circular opening in the cave,  
Thence issuing, they again beheld the stars."

The second vision, "the Purgatorio," is of a less gloomy aspect, although even here the stern spirit of the poet is manifest. The crimes that brought to the lonely and dreary Isle of Purgatory were having delayed repentance, pride, punished by having to carry heavy stones, avidity of worldly fame, envy,—the envious being clad in sackcloth and with their eyes sewn up with wire,—anger, greed, intemperance, also lapses into incontinence, which last had to be purified by fire. Vanity had also to be atoned for, which gives the poet an opportunity to read such a lecture as the pulpit has been profuse of ever since Eve wore fig leaves, on the vanity of female fashions, especially of the women of Florence, although surely ladies themselves are far better judges of what becomes them than bilious poet's or dyspeptic priests can possibly be. Plenty of examples of male offenders are given in all the iniquities, but in the whole range of purgatory Dante mentions only two women, and these it would seem to the reader were rather severely dealt with for the easy mistake of having procrastinated their repentance. One of these unfortunates was Madonna Pia, the original of Tennyson's beautiful poem "Mariana in the Moated Grange":

"Ah! when thou to the world shalt be returned  
And rested after thy long road," (so spake  
Next the third spirit,) "then remember me.  
I once was Pia. Sienna gave me life:  
Maremma took it from me. That he knows  
Who me with jewelled ring had first espoused."

The wretch to whom she alludes was her husband Nello Pietra, who confined her in a lonely house in the marshes that she might catch malaria and die. The other lady is supposed to have been that Countess Matilda who, in 1125, transferred her vast dowry to the Pope, and thus gave a temporal kingdom to the Papal See. This makes only two women stated to be in purgatory, or three including Sapphira, wife of Ananias, who was "in" for avarice. Doubtless there were a good many more, but these were all that Dante distinguished by name. We shall now see that ladies (as is natural to expect,) are much more plentiful in the land of paradise.

Virgil parted from Dante as they emerged from purgatory, and Beatrice became his guide through the realms of