

CANTO THE TWENTY-THIRD.

A R G U M E N T.

Our SAVIOUR appears in Triumph, furrounded by an innumerable
Company of the Blest.

AS the fond Mother, nestling in the grove,
Watches her slumb'ring family of Love,
While fable Night invests the 'face of things,
And hinders her excursions, to prepare
The daily dole, that feeds her callow care,
And spreads above them her maternal wings.

II.

As, anxious, waiting till the morning chill
Scatters the hoary dew o'er dale and hill,
Her eager eye anticipates the day :
Like her, thus longing for the Sun's uprise,
The Nymph was seen to point her kindling eyes
Where PHOEBUS' fiery wheels at noon delay.

III.

As thus in rapt expectancy she stood,
 Her eager action fir'd my kindling blood,
 Which caught her varying Passions as they rose :
 Scarce 'twixt her Hope and mine a moment pass'd,
 When other glories, dawning o'er the waste
 Of ÆTHER, seem'd new wonders to disclose.

IV.

“ Behold !” transported, she exclaim'd, “ behold
 The banners of Redemption there unfold,
 And all the ransom'd Trains, from all the Spheres,
 Attend their Saviour's jubilee above.”
 She ceas'd, and look'd with such transcendent love,
 That to display her charms the Muse forbears.

V.

And as pale CYNTHIA to the solar ray
 Her moving mirror holds, and meets the day
 With face direct, and o'er the tranquil scene
 Delighted bends her eye, her Nymphs around
 People with mingling beams the blue profound,
 And view with sparkling eyes their smiling Queen.

VI.

Thus, 'midst a thousand thousand living stars,
 Like Deities enthron'd in golden Cars,
 Half lost in the full blaze that flush'd the Sky;
 A glorious Sun his radiance threw around,
 Like ours, when rising o'er the blue profound,
 A radiant Form that mock'd the mortal eye.

VII.

“ What fights are here ; immortal Maid !” I cry’d,
 “ I sink, I fall !” “ Be firm,” the Nymph reply’d ;
 You see the virtue of th’ ETERNAL WORD,
 That dooms the rebel, and the loyal faves ;
 A stream of glory thro’ the yawning graves
 From Heav’n he sent, and Hell his might deplor’d.”

VIII.

As light’ning, darting from the heav’nly coast,
 Flashes expansive, till in Æther lost,
 Or glances on the ground, and dies away ;
 Thus, overcome by this celestial feast,
 My vagrant Soul, as from myself releas’d,
 From ev’ry recollection seem’d to stray.

IX.

Again was heard my Guide’s consoling voice :
 “ Since those interior splendours of the Skies
 You now have seen, you well can bear to view
 Me as I am, and meet my heav’nly smile.”
 Sudden I seem’d like one whose fruitless toil
 Tries a forgotten vision to renew.

X.

Then, oh ! what welcome met my ravish’d ears !
 Worthy that high degree above the Spheres !
 That Tablet, which preserves th’ ideal train,
 Till banish’d by affection, pain, or time,
 In ev’ry chance, or change, or place, or clime,
 For evermore that Image shall retain.

XI.

But if an hundred tuneful tongues should try
 This topic new, and all the Muses vie
 With all the jubilee of Heav'n in song ;
 Still vainly would they strive to match my theme,
 When, rapt to Heav'n in transport's sweet extreme,
 On that transfigur'd Form entranc'd I hung.

XII.

Forbear, O Muse ! altho' you try'd to soar
 O'er all the wonders of the World before,
 Here close your wing, and check your daring flight ;
 A chasm is here, which CLIO ne'er essay'd,
 A weight, by human balance yet unweigh'd,
 No wonder if such themes my soul affright !

XIII.

No narrow frith is here for me to fail,
 With mariners unskill'd, in pinnace frail :
 Weak pilot as I am, I dread to run
 On perils unperceiv'd, unfit to sway
 The guiding helm along an unknown way,
 Content the danger of the deep to shun.

XIV.

“ Why do you dwell on those inferior charms,
 Tho' knidling in your Soul such soft alarms ?
 That Light, which long you wish'd to view, survey ;
 Beneath whose smile ELYSIAN flow'rets spring,
 And all around immortal fragrance fling,
 And with ambrosial fruits his beam repay.

XV.

“ Here SHARON’s rose dispenses soft perfume,
 The type of HIM who, by celestial doom,
 Departing from his glory, took beneath
 A vest of clay ; and here the lilies blow,
 That shed their sweetness o’er the world of woe,
 Attracting mortals up the heav’nly Path.”

XVI.

Thus spoke the Guide ; and I, obsequious still
 To every motion of the Vestal’s Will,
 Try’d for a passing glimpse, but half in vain :
 The Vision look’d, as when the solar ray,
 In scatter’d glances, sheds a dubious day
 Thro’ curtain’d clouds on FLORA’s fragrant reign.

XVII.

Thus, o’er my dazzled eyes, in transient gloom,
 Mortality’s deep shadows seem’d to roam ;
 Yet oft, a vista of transcendent light,
 In long array, the passing triumph show’d ;
 On their deep files a stream of glory flow’d
 From some ætherial source above my sight.

XVIII.

“ Prime fount of Love ! on me you deign’d to flow,
 Tho’ shrowded from my sight, and left below
 Prints of thy glory, which a mortal’s eye
 Could suffer unsubdu’d ! that stainless Flow’r,
 Whose name I sing at morn and ev’ning hour,
 Rais’d me to bear the triumphs of the Sky.

St. xviii. l. 4. —that stainless Flow’r,] The Poet means here the
 Virgin MARY.

XIX.

As much her heav'nly glance the charms excell'd
 Of those angelic bands that lin'd the field,
 As here below her beauty all surpass'd :
 But long I look'd not, when a lamp of Light
 Ran round her glorious head in circle bright,
 And on her charms a double glory cast.

XX.

Then they began an holy hymn to breathe :
 The sweetest concert in this vale of Death
 Seem'd harsh, as muttering thunder to the ear,
 With this celestial strain compar'd, that rung
 Around, while overhead the garland hung,
 Brought by the Seraph from the op'ning Sphere.

XXI.

And thus he sung, responsive to the chime
 Of golden lyres below : " From heights sublime
 Down hither on the wings of Love I sail,
 The heav'nly Maid commission'd to attend ;
 With her again to glory I ascend,
 And HIM whose prowess forc'd th' infernal jail.

XXII.

" When her bright charms the heav'nly courts adorn,
 She breaks upon them like a double morn,
 Th' eternal Temples more majestic shine."
 Thus sung the circling Seraphim, and all
 The HIERARCHIES, respondent to the call,
 Proclaim'd the MOTHER of the Birth Divine.

XXIII.

The glowing concave of that hallow'd dome,
 Where all the circling worlds, that seem to roam
 In boundless mazes, find their fated place,
 For ever bright'ning in th' eternal beam,
 My straining eyes beheld in dubious gleam,
 Spanning all Nature in its wide embrace.

XXIV.

Too soon the long van, to that awful Sky
 Thro' the vast theatre ascending high,
 Was lost; nor last, with gemmy lustre crown'd,
 The fainted SPOUSE of JOSEPH thro' the gate
 Of Heav'n pursued her Son's ascending state,
 And glimm'ring vanish'd in the blue profound.

XXV.

Then, as an Infant for the lymph of life
 Extends its little hands in eager strife,
 And anxious longing for the tasted boon;
 So those who stay'd behind, with eager eye
 Seem'd to pursue the triumph up the Sky,
 To the high summit of th' eternal Noon.

XXVI.

“ Hail, Regent of the Stars !” I heard them sing ;
 Still in my ears their tuneful accents ring !
 O what an harvest of eternal joys
 Was theirs, whom heav'nly wisdom taught to know
 The season, in this mortal soil to throw
 The sacred seed that ripens in the Skies !

XXVII.

Here the deliver'd Saints enjoy the boon
Of life, and what they sow'd beneath the Moon
In tears, at BABYLON's unhallow'd stream,
Where long they mourn'd o'er SALEM's sacred spoils,
They reap above, the price of all their toils,
And sing with grateful voice the noble theme.

XXVIII.

There He, whose just hands hold the golden key
That opes the palace of Eternity,
Enjoys, with MOSES and EMMANUEL's Choir,
The vict'ries of the Faith ; and those who, led
By holy PAUL and BOANERGES, bled,
Are amply paid by Heav'n's eternal Sire.

St. xxviii. l. 1. There He,] St. PETER.

St. xxviii. l. 5. BOANERGES,] St. JOHN.

END OF THE TWENTY-THIRD CANTO.