

CANTO THE THIRTY-SECOND.

A R G U M E N T.

The Description of the Proceſſion continued.—The Poet arrives at the Tree of Knowledge of GOOD and EVIL.—Its Appearance deſcribed, and the Conſequences of his Arrival there.

THE tardy Season, ſpent on ſtubborn TROY,
 Had paſs'd, ſince I perceiv'd the taſte of joy :
 Oh! how my eager Soul, when bliſs return'd,
 Look'd thro' my eyes!—The glorious ſcenes, in vain,
 That fill'd the concave Sky, and thronging Plain,
 Led them from HER, whoſe abſence long I mourn'd.

II.

While on the Saint's tranſporting form I hung,
 I heard, in whiſpers, from the holy Throng,
 " His mortal Senſe will never bear the view."
 Inſtant the glowing circles ſeem'd to run
 Acroſs my ſight, like one that eyes the Sun,
 Whelming my ſenſe, and prov'd the warning true.

III.

But, when the vifual nerves refum'd their tone,
 I faw (tho' half their energy was gone)
 The heav'nly Squadron, ranging to the right,
 In glorious march, with Sol's afcending rays
 Weftward they wheel'd, reflecting blaze on blaze,
 While ftill before them fail'd the feven-fold Light.

IV.

As flying Squadrons fhun the ftorm of War,
 With fluctuating fhields, that gleam afar,
 And waving banners fpread; the Bleft were feen
 In mighty circuit verging to the Weft,
 Till they beheld the winged Team arreft,
 And turn its Pole upon the velvet green.

V.

Clofe by the fervid wheels, by left and right,
 The Vestals march'd along; a Bevy bright
 Still following, as their Mafter mov'd along,
 Sweeping the ample Sky, with fteady wing,
 While ſhe who wafh'd me in OBLIVION's fpring,
 With STATIUS, and with me, purfu'd the Throng.

VI.

Behind the wheel, which mark'd with narrower fweep
 The dexter path, along the foreft deep,
 Conceal'd in folitary gloom, we pafs'd;
 Mute were thefe Bowers where Angels fung of old,
 (Ere EVE her blifs for empty profpects fold,)
 And heav'nly Echoes cheer'd the blooming wafte.

VII.

Thrice had the winged arrow's founding flight
 Our journey measur'd, when, as swift as Light,
 BEATRICE left the Car: a fullen sound
 Slow wafted to my ear our Father's Name,
 Chanting the woful cause of Sin and Shame
 In dol'rous accents, thro' the woods profound.

VIII.

Round a lone Tree, amid a solemn glade,
 The radiant Team a mighty circuit made;
 By Winter scath'd, and mark'd with Thunder's scar
 It seem'd: no leaves it shew'd, nor scented bloom;
 Its long, funereal arms, in awful gloom
 Extended o'er the blasted heath afar.

IX.

Yet, not like other Trees its branches spread;
 With ampler sweep, as nearer to the head,
 The wide diverging boughs portentous wave
 High o'er the racking clouds, of giant size,
 Above those groves that shade the southern Skies,
 And tempest, flood, and fire, alternate brave.

X.

“ O happy THOU, who, while enshrin'd in dust,
 Never allur'd by thy degen'rate gust,
 Or tempting fruit thy bright reversion sold,
 When Appetite rebell'd.” Around the Tree
 Thus sung the Saints in heav'nly harmony,
 As to the trunk the hallow'd Chariot roll'd.

XI.

Then he, whose skill renew'd, by Heav'n's behest,
 The failing Race, by deadly Plagues oppress'd,
 Led on the team, and fix'd the radiant Pole,
 To the large Trunk, with art celestial bound
 To the paternal Stem, where first it found
 Its birth ere sever'd from the mighty bole.

XII.

As when with kindling wheels the Lord of Day
 Illumes the fleecy Star with genial ray,
 All Nature wakens from her torpid trance;
 While, slowly rising from the wint'ry Tomb,
 In ev'ry swelling bud the nascent bloom,
 Springing to Life, renews the vernal dance.

XIII.

Ere thro' the second Sign his chariot speeds,
 Young APRIL's tender hues adorn the meads;
 Thus, like the blushes of a vernal Sky,
 Where the fair Violet and full-blown Rose,
 Seem'd their sweet mingling colours to disclose,
 The wither'd Plant reviv'd, with signs of joy.

St. xi. l. 6. Its birth—] How this Chariot, which means the visible Church, drew its being from the Tree of Knowledge, seems rather a strained allegory; but it means, that the peculiar blessings of Redemption were the consequences of the Fall, by the operation of HIM who alone can bring Good out of Evil.—There is no satisfactory light thrown on it by the Commentators which I had an opportunity of consulting. VELLUTELLO says, it signifies, the perfect obedience of Christ annexed to the imperfect obedience of Man.

XIV.

But never could Imagination scan
 The peal of heav'nly praise, unmatched by Man,
 That, like a sudden Pæan, rung around
 From the deep thronging Theatre of Souls,
 Who sung their ransom to the lift'ning Poles;
 The potent charm my slumb'ring Senses bound.

XV.

Could I recal the sweet oblivious strain,
 That o'er the eyeballs of the watchful Swain
 A deep eclipse, with tuneful magic, drew;
 Then would I, with a master-hand, display
 My feelings, when the Soul's departing ray
 Sunk in a cloud of deep Cimmerian hue.

XVI.

Let others chuse the task, who wish to sing,
 How, in a coming trance, the mental Spring
 Gradual resigns her recollective might;
 Thro' the dark Medium loves the Muse to run,
 To the warm precincts of the golden Sun,
 When my recovering optics hail'd the Light.

XVII.

As, overwhelm'd by Light, with swimming eyes,
 Upon that fragrant Plant, which still supplies
 Angelic Food; while round the heav'nly Hall,
 The never-ending HYMENEALS ring,
 The GALILEANS gaz'd, till from their King
 That Voice they heard that rends the funeral pall.

St. xvii. l. 1. As, overwhelm'd by Light,—] Comparison drawn from the effect of the Transfiguration on the Apostles PETER, JAMES, and JOHN. Mat. xvii.

XVIII.

As they, on waking, saw the heav'nly Pair,
 Like Morning's muffled glories, loft in air,
 And their Great Master, late in radiance clad,
 Like SOL, divested of his Robes of Light,
 Or, as the dark'ned Moon salutes the Night,
 Dimly perceiv'd, with half his splendours fled.

XIX.

So wonder'd I to see the changing scene,
 For none was left on all the shady Green,
 But that fair Nymph that plung'd me in the Flood.
 "Where is BEATRICE?" in amaze I cry'd.
 "Seated beneath yon' Tree!" the Nymph reply'd;
 "Her seven Attendants range the neighb'ring wood.

XX.

"The rest arose upon the wafting gale,
 Up to the Zenith on triumphant fail,
 Their great Conductor glittering in the van:
 Sweet was the air, and solemn was the hymn
 They sung, as o'er the clouds I saw them skim,
 While round the cope of Heav'n the concert ran."

XXI.

Here ceas'd the Nymph, or I the rest forgot,
 For now my Empress my attention caught;
 Where, by the Tree, amid her vestal choir
 She sat, as Guardian of the sacred Team;
 The seven Lamps cast around a golden gleam,
 Scorning the BOREAL gale, or AUSTER's ire.

XXII.

“ A Forester,” she cry’d, “ you here must stay,
 Till the Metropolis her gates display ;
 You may expect the mighty Sov’reign soon,
 To give th’ adopting Sign : But, ere you go,
 Your Care a friendly warning must bestow
 On Sin’s devoted Slaves beneath the Moon.

XXIII.

“ Observe yon’ mystic Sign ;” I turn’d my eye
 Obedient to the Mandate of the Sky ;
 When, swifter than the blasting bolt of Jove,
 From the disparting Clouds an Eagle came,
 And thro’ the foliage shot like running flame,
 Rending those boughs, the Pride of all the Grove.

XXIV.

Then the proud Chariot, with impetuous flight
 The Bird assail’d ; it swerv’d beneath his might,
 Like a tall Frigate by a furious storm
 Compell’d to reel ; while, on its rocking feat,
 A fly Fox clamber’d with polluted feet :
 Consuming want had pin’d his meagre form.

St. xxiii. l. 4. —an Eagle came,] By the *Eagle* is meant the Power of the ROMAN Empire ; first inimical, and then friendly, to the Church ; *covering it with new spoils*, and supporting it with its influence.—See *St. xxviii.*

St. xxiv. l. 5. A fly Fox—] By the *Fox* is meant, the various Heresies of the first Ages, suppressed by BEATRICE, or true Theology.—LANDINO, &c.

XXV.

But the fair Vestal, with a stern regard,
 His wiles detected, and his entrance barr'd,
 And sent the fell Anatomy away,
 Just as his wasted bones could bear his weight;
 Then Jove's proud Bird, above the Car of State,
 His ample pinions spread in large display.

XXVI.

All sudden, I beheld the moving Throne
 Before, behind, with moulted plumage strown,
 Then loud laments along the welkin roll'd,
 As of a Spirit, who in anguish hung
 O'er the sad scene: "Ill-fated Ship, how long
 Shall that sad burden fill your sacred hold!"

XXVII.

These mournful accents in an Earthquake ceas'd,
 And instant, from the rocking ground releas'd,
 Between the wheels a scaly Serpent drew
 His fatal spires, and spread his Dragon wing,
 Then struck the sacred Seat with deadly sting,
 And soon the sacred Seat in fragments flew.

XXVIII.

The ruin'd remnant, like an hearse, was clad
 With waving plumes, that all around it spread;

St. xxvii. l. 3. —a scaly Serpent] By the SERPENT is meant MAHOMET; and his Destruction of the Imperial Seat, means the loss of JERUSALEM.—LANDINO, &c.

Unhappy boon ; though giv'n without deceit,
 Concealing from the view (as o'er the foil
 Summer her liv'ry spreads with cheerful smile)
 The shatter'd fellies and the broken feat.

XXIX.

When, lo ! a breathing time was scarce allow'd,
 When, like pale Spectres, from the fun'ral shroud,
 At ev'ry corner of that umber'd Car,
 An hideous face, with giant features, frown'd ;
 Three perch'd upon the Pole, twice two around
 With baleful accents breath'd revenge and war.

St. xxix. l. 5. Three perch'd upon the Pole—] It is quite amusing to see the pains taken by the ITALIAN Commentators to explain these SEVEN HEADS and TEN HORNS, in a different sense from what they are held to typify in their original place in the Revelations. LANDINO and the rest make the TEN HORNS to signify the Ten Commandments, and SEVEN HEADS the Seven Sacraments. DANIELLO supposes they mean the Seven Electors of the Empire ; and honest VELLUTELLO, who is somewhat nearer to the mark, imagines they signify the SEVEN deadly Sins. LANDINO is obliged to have recourse to the above-mentioned expedient, as he finds the Heads and Horns so attached to the Chariot, or Church, that they must stand or fall together. But other Interpreters give these types a different meaning. Even LANDINO is obliged to confess, that by the *gigantic Lover* is meant PHILIP LE BEL of FRANCE ; by the *Adulteress*, Pope BONIFACE the Eighth, or CLEMENT the Fifth, whose intrigues with this Monarch, and alliances formed against him, occasioned much mischief to the Papal interest. See Hist. Flor. and Notes upon the twenty-eighth Canto of the INFERNO. See Sir ISAAC NEWTON on Daniel ; and HURD, BAGOT, HALIFAX, and KET on the Prophecies.

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XXX.

Their fronts were doubly arm'd; like AMMON'S God,
 The deadly four, that round the Chariot stood,
 Each with a solitary horn was seen ;
 No shapes so miscreated and uncouth,
 Yet ever rais'd their heads, from North to South,
 To scare the Nations with GORGONIAN mien.

XXXI.

Firm as a rock, that scorns the lapse of Time,
 A loose Adult'refs, on the feat sublime,
 Allur'd the crowd with loud CIRCEAN look ;
 New wonders still the plastic pow'r employ'd,
 An hideous Confort, feated by her fide,
 Low bending seem'd to Love's imperious yoke.

XXXII.

But, when the Lover mark'd her wand'ring eye,
 Caught by each transient Form that fled by,
 By jealous heat inflam'd, his cruel hand
 Scourg'd her without remorse; then, fir'd by rage,
 He drew the Chariot from its verdant stage,
 And dragg'd it on in triumph o'er the land.

END OF THE THIRTY-SECOND CANTO.