

CANTO THE THIRTY-SECOND.

A R G U M E N T.

The Poet describes the Order of the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Evangelists, in their several Stations; and relates a Solution given by the Spirit of St. BERNARD to some Doubts that arose in his Mind.

STOOPING from Contemplation's lofty height,
 With humbler office pleas'd, the Heir of Light
 Thus deign'd to shew the secrets of the Blest,
 And their employments, to the Son of Man;
 And thus again, with aspect mild, began
 To paint the regions of eternal rest:

II.

Behold that Beauty, whose æthereal charms,
 Excelling human grace, the bosom warms;
 At MARY's feet the lovely Stranger lies:
 See! with what gratitude she lifts her look
 To her, whose SON th' EGYPTIAN bondage broke,
 And gave for sin the balsam of the Skies!

III.

“ 'Tis she, whose error barb'd the fatal dart
Of Sin, and gave it passage to the heart :

REBECCA there with RACHEL sit below,
Your Guide with SARAH joins, an holy pair,
And, station'd at her side, BETHULIA's Fair
Displays the civic garland on her brow.

IV.

“ Then she, from whom the regal Poet sprung,
Who steep'd in tears his penitential song ;

Then, in long order, all that lov'd to guide,
In the dark regions of the world beneath,
Their painful progress by the lamp of Faith,
In various orders fill the Concave wide.

V.

“ Follow my guiding hand, with watchful eyes ;
Yon' sev'nfold range that seems to prop the Skies,
The blooming Pride contains of JACOB's race,
A bevy made for Heav'n in ranks dispos'd,
As Faith below the portion'd Light disclos'd
To ev'ry beauteous Denizen of Grace.

VI.

“ As 'midst his blooms the studious Florist strays,
And ev'ry stem thro' all the painted maze

St. iii. l. 1. 'Tis she—] EVE.

3. REBECCA,] Wife to ISAAC.

3. RACHEL,] Wife to JACOB.

4. SARAH,] Wife to ABRAHAM ; described as sitting
with BEATRICE.

5. BETHULIA's Fair,] JUDITH.

Distinctly views, I mean your search to guide,
 Where yon' wide Host the full Assembly shows
 (As when in Summer-pride the garden glows)
 Of all, who on the coming CHRIST rely'd.

VII.

“ Nearer the dusky space that lies between,
 And marks with shadowy cone the splendid Scene,
 Parting, with dim Eclipse, the circling ray ;
 In radiant Files the happy Bands are found,
 Who, on the lapse of Time's revolving round,
 Already saw their Saviour's natal Day.

VIII.

“ And as the female Camp is seen to spread,
 From MARY's bright Imperial Throne display'd,
 Confronting her, the BAPTIST fits sublime,
 And counts an equal Host ; tho', far beneath,
 A few sad years he walk'd the shades of Death,
 Before EMMANUEL paid the STYGIAN gloom.

IX.

“ Beneath his glorious feet his Pupils lie,
 Reposing on the bosom of the Sky,
 Far as the eye can reach, in many a stage
 Circling the mighty void ; AUGUSTINE there,
 FRANCIS, and holy BENEDICT, appear,
 With many a Saint renown'd from age to age.

St. v, vi.] The Department of the HEBREW and CHRIST-
 IAN Women, distinguished by Faith and Charity.

X.

“ Thus, either wing of this celestial Host
 Its equal Legions of the Blest can boast ;
 But in yon' space between, a vast profound,
 The ransom'd Souls possess a lower Sky,
 Who on another's virtue must rely,
 Redeem'd, ere Reason fill'd its tardy round.

XI.

“ Their smiles, that like the infant dawn appear,
 Their gentle modulations, soft and clear,
 Distinguish them from all the Blest above:
 You seem to doubt, but soon, like op'ning Day,
 Your doubts, by Grace dispell'd, shall melt away,
 When Heav'n displays her Mysteries of Love.

XII.

“ Chance has no empire here, nor Want, nor Woe ;
 Whate'er you see, from Heav'n's appointment flow,
 True as the Image to the plastic Mould ;
 Those Tribes, that mount to Heav'n on various plume,
 As sov'reign Wisdom gives, each lot assume
 Their various stations in the heav'nly Fold.

XIII.

“ The Sov'reign of the Blest, who still bestows
 Those joys that ev'ry happy Being knows,

St. x. l. 4. The ransom'd Souls—] i. e. Of those who die in infancy, and are redeemed (according to the Theology of the times) by the merits of our Saviour, without performing the conditions.

Nor lets a Creature here of Want complain,
 At its Creation portions out his Grace,
 As sov'reign Reason wills, in time and place,
 To ev'ry Order of his subject Train.

XIV.

“ This may suffice ; let Scripture tell the rest :
 ESAU rejected, and his Brother blest'd,
 Contended in the womb before their birth ;
 The kindred Love descends where'er it finds
 Congenial fuel in regen'rate Minds,
 Where Grace can breed the Plant of genuine worth

XV.

“ Their Parent's Faith, with their innoxious state
 Combining, fix'd at once their happy fate :

St. xiv. l. 2. ESAU rejected,] This is only (according to the best Commentators) meant of the promulgation of the Mosaic Law by the descendants of JACOB, when those of ESAU were left to the light of Nature, and of the Patriarchal traditions. (See RAMSAY'S Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, part ii.) But it is not to be supposed that *they* were therefore less favoured ; for the *Gentiles*, that have not the law, yet do *by nature* the things of the law, are entitled to a share in the benefits of Redemption, as may be inferred from St. PAUL'S words : and our Saviour himself says, “ it will be more *tolerable for TYRE and SIDON,*” that is, even for the impenitent *Sinners* among the Heathen, than for impenitent Sinners under Revelation ; plainly implying, that the virtuous, in both situations, shall reap the fruits of their virtue.

The present Bishop of LINCOLN has ably elucidated, in a few words, that remarkable text of St. PAUL, Rom. viii. 29. “ Whom he foreknew, them he also predestinated ;” *i. e.* Those whose voluntary obedience to the call of Grace and the voice of Conscience he foresaw, them he predestinated to happiness, as being qualified for it.—Bishop of LINCOLN on the seventeenth Article.

The Rite of Blood, in darker times, assur'd
 Their title to the Skies; in days of Grace,
 The Fount that clears primeval sin had place,
 And their eternal Happiness secur'd.

XVI.

“ But leave these doubts for Time to clear away,
 And learn from that sweet Face to bear the ray
 Of full Divinity, which soon will shine
 On your material Orbs.” I rais'd my eye,
 And saw, descending from a loftier Sky,
 O'er her transcendent charms, a Light divine.

XVII.

Half thro' the Glory seen, a sudden flight
 Of hov'ring Angels seem'd to watch the Light;
 But such a glorious glimpse its moving Beam
 In that æthereal Countenance reveal'd,
 That all my senses in oblivion held,
 Sunk down at once beneath the sweet extreme.

XVIII.

The first, that gliding down the Beam appear'd,
 With humble act the holy Maid rever'd:
 “ Hail sov'reign Dame! endow'd with heav'nly
 Grace.”
 I saw the umbrage of his wings display'd,
 I heard afar those hallow'd sounds convey'd,
 By the full Chorus, o'er th' æthereal Space:

XIX.

“ O Sage ! in pity leave the heav’nly Choir,
 A while to satisfy a Man’s desire ;
 Say, who is he that hails the sacred Maid,
 With such peculiar fervour in his eye,
 As if from thence he drank celestial Joy ?”
 I spoke ; and thus, the rev’reud Senior said :

XX.

“ Transport like his we all would wish to know ;
 ’Twas he that told, with triumph on his brow,
 To that celestial Fair, the sacred Freight
 That soon should fill her Womb ; but view around,
 What throng’d Patricians hide the heav’nly ground,
 In all the splendours of empyreal state.

XXI.

“ Those two, that seem to lead the heav’nly Choir
 With equal step, are Man’s primeval Sire
 With CEPHAS rank’d ; the central Stems they seem
 Of that far spreading supra-mundane ROSE :
 The left is his, whose weakness caus’d our woes,
 The hapless Fount of Sin’s polluted Stream.

XXII.

“ The right is his, to whom his Lord consign’d
 The Keys of Heav’n, with pow’r to loose and bind ;

St. xx. l. 2. ’Twas he that told,—] The Angel GABRIEL.

St. xxi. l. 2. —Man’s primeval Sire,] ADAM.

3. CEPHAS] PETER.

Behind, the Prophet comes, in holy trance,
 Who, thro' the long extent of times to come,
 Saw, with prefaging heart, the gath'ring Gloom
 Of future storms, o'er SALEM's Hills advance.

. XXIII.

“ He, that with Manna fed the moving Host,
 There stands, with interchanging beam oppos'd
 To him; and ANNA, by th' Apostle's side,
 Beholds her Daughter with a Mother's joy,
 In yon' æthereal Conclave thron'd so high,
 And in eternal Songs of praise employ'd.

XXIV.

“ There, to the Parent of the human Race
 Oppos'd, the gentle LUCIA finds her place,
 Who sent BEATRICE to the world beneath,
 To drag you trembling from the gloomy steep,
 Where late, suspended o'er the raging Deep,
 You seem'd just plunging in the Vale of Death.

XXV.

“ But swift the moments fly, we here must pause,
 Nor dare to trench upon th' eternal Laws,

St. xxii. l. 3. Behind, the Prophet—] St. JOHN, who saw the
 APÓCALYPSE.

St. xxiii. l. 1. He,—] MOSES.

3. ANNA,] Supported by the Authors of Traditionary
 History, the Mother of the Virgin MARY. The ANNA in the first
 of Luke is not meant.

That bound our Voyage thro' the realms above ;
One task remains, and that a task of joy,
Thro' his effulgent robe of Light to spy
(As far as Sight can reach) the SOURCE OF LOVE.

XXVI.

“ In that great Ocean, when you leave the Shore,
Soon will you sink at once, to rise no more,
Unless supernal Grace your pinions plume :
But let your heart with my orisons rise,
Soon will the Vestal's hand unbar the Skies,
And beatific Views your Sight illumine.”

END OF THE THIRTY-SECOND CANTO.