

CANTO THE FIRST.

ARGUMENT.

THE POET in a Vision, or Dream, finds himself in the middle of a pathless wood, beset with Beasts of Prey, which he attempts in vain to escape, till he is accosted by the Spirit of *Virgil*; who advises him not to attempt the common road, but to follow his guidance, through a dark and subterraneous passage.

WHEN life had labour'd up her midmost stage,
And, weary with her mortal pilgrimage,
 Stood in suspense upon the point of Prime;
Far in a pathless grove I chanc'd to stray,
Where scarce imagination dares display,
 The gloomy scen'ry of the savage clime.

II.

On the deep horrors of the tangled dell,
With dumb dismay, the pow'rs of mem'ry dwell,
 Scenes, terrible as dark impending fate!
Yet tell, O muse! what intellectual store
I glean'd along the solitary shore,
 And sing in louder strains the heav'nly freight.

III.

III.

Whether entranc'd, I left the certain path,
 'Rapt in a vision, to the vale of death,
 (Such slumbers seal'd my sense) is all unknown;
 Yet down the glen, that fill'd my soul with fright,
 I stray'd :—when lo ! an hill's aerial height,
 Vested with glory, met the rising sun.

IV.

Now fled my fear, that thro' the toilsome night
 The vital current froze, and urg'd my flight,
 When the sad moments of despair I told.
 Then, like a toil-worn mariner I stood,
 Who, newly scap'd the perils of the flood,
 Turns him again the danger to behold.

V.

Thus all the horrors of that hideous coast,
 That dreary wild by mortal never crost,
 I ponder'd o'er, exhausted as I lay :
 Then up the hill, that o'er the valley hung,
 With new recover'd pow'rs instinctive sprung ;
 Easing with planted step the toilsome way.

VI.

When lo ! a Panther in the op'ning strait,
 Couchant, with flaming eyes, expecting fat,
 All formidably gay, in speckl'd pride.
 Suspense, I fought to shun the dubious war,
 But the grim tyrant of the woods afar *
 Still opposite his prey, malignant ey'd.

VII.

* By the Panther, the Lion, and the Wolf that beset DANTE
 in this gloomy vale, is meant (say the Commentators) “ the three
 “ reign-

VII.

Sweet rose the vernal morn, for now the fun
 With those fair lights his jocund race begun,
 That saw with springing time the hand of love
 Strike from the fullen deep the seeds of life,
 And from the mafs of elemental strife,
 Elance yon burning orbs that roll above.

VIII.

The chearful morn, and spring's benignant fmile,
 New hope inspir'd, to feize the gaudy spoil,
 And with the speckled hide my limbs invest ;
 But other cares the childish hope with-held,
 For other thoughts the rage of combat quell'd,
 And the warm instinct of my soul fuppreft.

IX.

For following close behind, a fiercer foe,
 (With rage and famine seem'd his eyes to glow)
 A Lion shook his long terrific mane :
 The hush'd winds seem'd his dreadful look to fear.
 A famish'd Wolf attendant in the rear,
 Like some gaunt fury, clos'd the deadly train.

“ reigning vices of the three stages of human life, sensuality, ambition, and avarice,”—

——A plague well known on many a wafted shore,—St. 10.

It is certain, that the Poet's three grand divisions of the Infernal Regions correspond, in a good measure, with the distinction he makes here ; the upper apartments being allotted principally to the lovers of sensuality, the middle to ambition, and the lowest to the tribes of avarice.

X.

X.

His look betray'd unbounded thirst of gore,
 A plague well known on many a wafted shore;
 Again I left the height, by fear opprest.
 Thus the reward of many a toilsome day,
 In one disastrous moment snatch'd away,
 With disappointment chills the widow'd breast.

XI.

I fled; she follow'd down the dreary dell,*
 The sun retiring, look'd a sad farewell;
 'Till ev'ry ling'ring hope my soul forsook:
 Thus, while I stray'd along in dumb despair,
 A beck'ning shadow faintly seen afar,
 With still, small voice, the dreary silence broke.

XII.

"Whether of Heav'n," I cry'd, "or earthly born,
 Extend thy pity to a wretch forlorn,"
 I spoke, and thus reply'd the gentle shade:
 Not earthly now, tho' born of human race,
 From LOMBARD swains my lowly birth I trace;
 Ere Julius yet the Roman sceptre sway'd."

* By the Poet's attempting to force the pass beset with monsters, the commentators say, is meant that presumption which attempts to encounter and make its way through the views and miseries of human life, without attending to the light of reason, which is here introduced under the character of the spirit of VIRGIL.—For the suggestions of Reason on a future state—See the Comparative View of the INFERNO, &c.

XIII.

XIII.

“ Me thence to *Rome*, his great successor led,
While yet the pow’rs of darkness held in dread
The world, unconscious of their coming doom,
Arms and the Man I sung, who sent by fate,
On *Troy’s* sad reliques rais’d a nobler state,
And the long glories of majestic *Rome*.

XIV.

“ Say, what detains thy ling’ring feet below,
On yonder hill eternal pleasures blow ;
To this Cimmerian vale, can aught invite ?”
“ If *MARCO’S* name be thine,” abash’d, I cry’d,
“ That source which sent thro’ many a region wide
Such living torrents of poetic light :

XV.

“ Hail ! Father of the Song ! if filial awe,
With which I trac’d of old thy sacred law,
Can aught the pupil of thy muse avail ;
If in some happier line, thy spirit breathe,
If these blest temples own thy lineal wreath,
Oh ! teach thy son, yon’ envy’d heights to scale.

XVI.

“ Where’er I wander thro’ the glimm’ring shade,
Fate couches near in deadly ambushade,
And chilly dews my shiv’ring members steep :
See ! where she waits, her victim to surprise !”
“ Another path is thine,” the Poet cries,
“ To lead thee from the valley dark and deep.”

St. xiii. l. 4.] DRYDEN.

XVII.

I wept, while gently thus my guardian God :
 “ Avoid yon’ dark and un auspicious road,
 By Fiends frequented, and by fate o’erhung;
 Monster so fell, *Numidia* never bore,
 As she, who riots there in human gore,
 By unextinguishable famine stung.

XVIII.

“ The Fiend her hunger tries to fate in vain,
 Still grows her appetite with growing pain,
 And ceaseless rapine feeds the rising blaze ;
 Then, fill’d by many a Sire, the noxious pest
 Shall propagate along from east to west,
 Till FELTRO’s noble Hound begins the chase.

XIX.

“ From FELTRO’s noble heir she meets her fate,
 FELTRO ! a name intrinsically great,
 Above the little aid of gems or gold ;
 His truth and worth the haras’d land shall save
 Where NISUS fills an honourable grave,
 For which CAMILLA fell, and TURNUS bold.

XX.

“ Then Hell shall gorge her own infernal brood,
 To envy’s cavern by the foe pursu’d,
 Whence first to light the baleful being sprung ;
 But Heav’n in love to thee hath sent me here
 A kind and faithful guide—dismiss thy fear,
 Thro’ other worlds to lead thy steps along.

St. xviii. l. 6.] An allusion to the name of CANE LA SCALA,
 the generous Patron of DANTE, who gave him an honourable and
 friendly reception in his exile.

XXI.

“ Thine ears must meet the yell of stern despair,
Where Heav’n’s avenging hand forgets to spare,
And tribes forlorn a second death implore :
Then those that sing amid the purging flame,
Inspir’d by ling’ring hope at last to claim
A tardy wafture to the happy shore.

XXII.

“ Proscrib’d, I thence retire, and one succeeds
Heav’n’s Denizen, whose happier guidance leads,
(If thou aspire) the seats of bliss to gain :
For he that holds the universe in awe
My soul excludes, an alien to his law,
From the dread glories of his heav’nly reign.

XXIII.

“ With incommunicable splendour bright,
In the high citadel of life and light,
The Sire of being sits in regal state ;
Thrice happy he that shares the gladfome ray,
Where in the precincts of eternal day
His chosen faints the holy influence wait.

XXIV.

“ Then, by that Heav’n, and Heav’n-taught muse,” I
“ From this ill omen’d vale thy pupil guide, [cry’d,
And teach my feet to shun the fatal shore ;
Shew where the finners mourn their stated time
’Till PETER call them to an happier clime.”
I spoke, the Bard in silence sped before.

END OF THE FIRST CANTO.