

Gustave Doré's Purgatory and Paradise. Gustave Doré has, on the whole, succeeded in illustrating the Purgatory. The drawings are a little too like those in the Inferno, too dreadful, too little penetrated by the idea of hope, to realize perfectly the idea which one attaches to the Catholic Purgatory, the place of purification, rather than of punishment only, but still they are very wonderful drawings.

There is very little in it, nothing indeed but one of those dark shadowy depths which only Gustave Doré has learned perfectly to draw; but above the ravine flits or marches the faint shadowy host, half-angelic, which reaches down only rather than rises, a misty no-utter, not fatal to reflection, or even to a faint interest in things around, but still misery of an intense kind.

The use of shadowy forms with lighted outlines is apparently the instrument by which Gustave Doré hopes to produce his effect, a grand idea of endurance which would not be endurance, which would almost be happiness, were there only light; but he does produce it most effectively, even when he strays from the true idea of God's providence in dealing with His creatures—no spirit of torture rises and rises also it does in the poem—till in the figures which the flames lick but cannot burn, exciting an agony of fear rather than an agony of physical pain, we have men to whom hell with its permanence was almost redemption. And yet criticism of this kind on the Purgatory is not criticism. Look the drawing through, slowly, meditatively, thinking of Dante, and not either of theology or Doré; and slowly, as we do so, it will somehow dawn upon you, unwilling to accept it, that in these heights and depths, these tricks of the perpendicular—for they are tricks—these gleams of an invisible sun, and hints of present angels, in this deep gleam over all which yet leaves men human and souls beautiful, in these clouds which do not hide rays, but hide their sources, in these projections without a shrine—the monkish idea of *ceci* has bidden his creature—no occasions in which there is a sub-idea sometimes of horror, sometimes of grotesquerie (*vide* page 164, where beasts with the batwings which Doré gives the Devil, and women's breasts, and heads of animal or bird, are driving the sages of mankind), the true thought of a half-inspired poet has found an expression almost as full as itself; less near perhaps to our hearts; more near to those physical emotions within us, those horrors, repugnances, disgusts of which the nearest and the truest we can say is that they are instinctive, that they are coordinate in origin with the reason which judges them, and, therefore, beyond perfect analysis by an equal power. The illustrations which can effect this impression are great, even though a minute study of them might reveal the small artifices by which the impression is created.

The Purgatory does not strike us equally. The leading idea of the series of drawings—figures bathed in light wheeling in eccentric circles round a half visible centre, figures usually winged—in itself a somewhat feeble notion—has a striking but rather indistinct effect (in 352 it is decidedly operative), and the bodies of saintly women, in long dresses falling perpendicular, fall to impress us as all. They are serious and beautiful, but not divine. The Cross borne by wreaths of angels who are not—if we may be allowed so mundane a criticism—all flying the same way, would be a wonderful hint for Dieppe workers in ivory, but is too material altogether for the idea it is intended to convey, at least to minds which feel in Jesus something more than the Being extended on the cross and suffering untold agony to be repaid by triumph beyond words; that which is in Doré's *Paradise* and nothing can be said to fall; but nothing succeeds fully, nothing satisfies the longing in every heart to conceive of what "Paradise" is the home of the redeemed, may be. There are fair landscapes, and saintly figures, and glorious ideas of a new relation to something above ourselves: but of peace, and light, and beauty, of the peace which passeth expression, of the light which comes from His presence, of the beauty which should be in the souls of those who are with Him, there is no trace. Some faint gleam of joy, of the rapture of satisfied benevolence, ought surely to be apparent in the face of the watching Dante, and is not, though once it is irradiated by angelic light. The artist would say we are demanding too much. Possibly, but then we are not demanding more than Dante, by the consent of mankind, has in some more or less materialistic way succeeded in giving. We cannot say, and we speak as admirers of Doré's genius, that we think he has succeeded, or that we do not open to him, perhaps to give us the true Paradise, the place—for to Dante it was a place—beyond all human imagination, to fix the divine dream, that floated before the author of the *Apocalypse*, that it was open to him to do what Southey did, draw a place in which at least the human heart could rest satisfied that the highest human ideal, earth without sin, has been exceeded. This Mr. Doré has not done, and while his *Inferno* will make Dante's lives, and the *Purgatory* will have without quite deserving, its immortality, the *Paradise* will, we fear, be quoted only as a proof how close the inexorable limits around genius, even when it is as great as that of M. Gustave Doré.—London Spectator.

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