

THE "THREE BLESSED LADIES" OF THE DIVINE COMEDY

"Però se il caldo Amor lo chiara Vista
Della prima Virtù dispone e segna,
Tutta la perfezion quivi s'acquista."

Par. xiii, 79-81.

When Virgil first offers escape from the Dark Wood by the roundabout way through Hell and Purgatory, Dante accepts at once with grateful relief. But as the night shadows gather, his resolution falters. What Virgil proposed had indeed been done by mortal men. Virgil's own hero, Aeneas, had descended into Hell; St. Paul had been caught up into the Third Heaven; and both had come back to earthly life. But, exclaimed Dante,

"Io non Enea, io non Paolo sono." ¹

Virgil meets this pusillanimous doubt ² by assuring Dante that divine aid will be given. Indeed, as Virgil will tell the various

¹ *Inf.* ii, 32.

² *Ib.* 43-48.