

## HOLY POVERTY AND HER THREEFOLD HEAVEN.

by

IACOPONE DA TODI (1228—1306)

[This is *Lauda LX*, pp. 132—3 in the edition of Ferri and Caramella (*Scrittori d'Italia*, 1930). On the names and significance of the three heavens, see St. Thomas, *S.T.* I, 68, 4. The third heaven, though in a sense 'nameless' (stanza 25 here), is also of course the Empyrean, and is called so in *Lauda XCI*, l. 147.]

He that has Poverty for love  
 Has for dominion peace;  
 Stormless his paths and safe, for there  
 Robber and envier cease.

In calm he dies; is at no pains  
 To make a testament;  
 In calm he lives; lets the world lie  
 And ministers content.

He fees no lawyer, great or small;  
 No dues to court he bears;  
 He laughs to see the miser stoop  
 Under his pack of cares.

High wisdom is in Poverty,  
 For nothing holds her thrall;  
 Disdaining all things under God,  
 She can command them all.

He who disdains can best possess,  
 In wholeness can abide  
 And treading sure, with feet unsnared,  
 Labour till eventide.

He who desires cannot possess;  
 'Tis things possess their lover;  
 Self-sold to them, he rues the cheat  
 His afterthoughts discover.

Too low I gaze ever to find  
In vassalage a goal;  
I dare not blot with vanity  
God's image in the soul.

God will not house in narrow breast,  
But love's the measure here;  
Great-hearted Poverty can close  
The Godhead in her sphere.

A mystic heaven is Poverty,  
To earth-dim eyes concealed.  
In the third heaven deep things are heard  
That may not be revealed.

The first heaven is the firmament—  
All honour's there denied.  
How many a pilgrim to soul's peace  
Does honour lure aside!

If you would have it die in you,  
Wealth you will dispossess,  
Bid learning hush, and banish far  
Renown for holiness.

Riches leave time all unredeemed;  
Knowledge puffs up the heart;  
At sainthood's name, hypocrisy  
Crowds in from every part.

The heaven of stars I think is his  
Who can these things resign.  
More high, more secret is the heaven  
Of waters crystalline.

Four winds that rise over the sea  
The spirit's calm destroy,  
And these are fear, and with it hope,  
Sorrow, and with it joy.

Harder it is to banish these  
Than all that went before.  
Here to the wise I speak; the rest  
Will bear my words no more.

All fear of hell, all hope of heaven  
 The soul must learn to leave,  
 At good things had must not rejoice,  
 At evil must not grieve.

Here virtue serves not; from without  
 The enabling power inflows;  
 All un-self-known it keeps the self  
 Till strength from weakness grows.

When virtues stripped to nakedness  
 With full-clad vices meet,  
 In little time the encumbered foe  
 Lies dead about their feet.

Up from the fray the virtues rise,  
 Scatheless henceforth to be;  
 There greets them now with all her train  
 Impassibility.

The third last heaven is infinite,  
 Past measure wide and high;  
 All wit's ambition here must fail,  
 All mind's conceiving die.

The spirit stripped of every good,  
 Of virtue dispossessed,  
 Reaps here the bargain's fruit, and is  
 In self-abasing blessed.

The tissue of this heaven is Naught;  
 Its ground in Naught is laid;  
 Here in the truth abides the love  
 That's pure and perfect made.

In this high realm the thing that Is  
 The thing that Seems belies;  
 Pride is in heaven; Humility  
 Down to perdition flies.

Betwixt the virtue and the act  
 Lurks many a snare and net,  
 And some that think they hold the prize  
 Are heavenless earthlings yet.

This heaven is nameless; thought of it  
 Never shall tongue express.  
 Love as in prison lies therein,  
 Shadowed in light's excess.

The light that was is lost in dark;  
 Dark into day is scattered;  
 Thus has the new philosophy  
 The ancient bottles shattered.

Where Christ our Lord engrafted is,  
 Old things being done away,  
 He and the soul are interfused,  
 More one than man shall say.

There without intellect she knows,  
 Without affection loves;  
 Her will to God's will lifted up  
 At his sole motion moves.

But if I live, and yet not I,  
 Have being, yet not mine,  
 This one-in-twain and twain-in-one  
 How shall my words define?

That man is poor who, having naught,  
 From will to have is free,  
 And who is lord of all things made  
 In the spirit's liberty.

*Translated by* WALTER SHEWRING.

### THE FEAST OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST, 1944.

[To the Right Reverend Edward Ellis, Bishop of Nottingham, these verses are respectfully dedicated.]

1. 'Tis not for me to speak in the name of one nation only;  
 I am not myself and am not free to speak.  
 I am an exile wherever I may be and lonely  
 though filled with the love that all mankind should seek;  
 for as a Pole I may not speak for Britain,  
 nor as a Briton may I speak as a Pole;  
 for even by the blood it is most surely written  
 that I am a hybrid and therefore as neither whole.