The Divine Comedy

by Dante Alighieri

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DIVINE COMEDY ***

THE DIVINE COMEDY

THE VISION

of

HELL, PURGATORY, AND PARADISE

BY DANTE ALIGHIERI

TRANSLATED BY

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Illustrated by M. Gustave Doré

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HELL

OR THE INFERNO

CANTO I

In the midway of this our mortal life,

I found me in a gloomy wood, astray

Gone from the path direct: and e’en to tell

It were no easy task, how savage wild

That forest, how robust and rough its growth,

Which to remember only, my dismay

Renews, in bitterness not far from death.

Yet to discourse of what there good befell,

All else will I relate discover’d there.

How first I enter’d it I scarce can say,

Such sleepy dullness in that instant weigh’d

My senses down, when the true path I left,

But when a mountain’s foot I reach’d, where clos’d

The valley, that had pierc’d my heart with dread,

I look’d aloft, and saw his shoulders broad

Already vested with that planet’s beam,

Who leads all wanderers safe through every way.

Then was a little respite to the fear,

That in my heart’s recesses deep had lain,

All of that night, so pitifully pass’d:

And as a man, with difficult short breath,

Forespent with toiling, ’scap’d from sea to shore,

Turns to the perilous wide waste, and stands

At gaze; e’en so my spirit, that yet fail’d

Struggling with terror, turn’d to view the straits,

That none hath pass’d and liv’d. My weary frame

After short pause recomforted, again

I journey’d on over that lonely steep,
The hinder foot still firmer. Scarce the ascent

Began, when, lo! a panther, nimble, light,

And cover’d with a speckled skin, appear’d,

Nor, when it saw me, vanish’d, rather strove

To check my onward going; that ofttimes

With purpose to retrace my steps I turn’d.

The hour was morning’s prime, and on his way

Aloft the sun ascended with those stars,

That with him rose, when Love divine first mov’d

Those its fair works: so that with joyous hope

All things conspir’d to fill me, the gay skin

Of that swift animal, the matin dawn

And the sweet season. Soon that joy was chas’d,

And by new dread succeeded, when in view

A lion came, ’gainst me, as it appear’d,
With his head held aloft and hunger-mad,

That e’en the air was fear-struck. A she-wolf

Was at his heels, who in her leanness seem’d

Full of all wants, and many a land hath made

Disconsolate ere now. She with such fear

O’erwhelmed me, at the sight of her appall’d,

That of the height all hope I lost. As one,

Who with his gain elated, sees the time

When all unwares is gone, he inwardly

Mourns with heart-griping anguish; such was I,

Haunted by that fell beast, never at peace,

Who coming o’er against me, by degrees

Impell’d me where the sun in silence rests.

While to the lower space with backward step

I fell, my ken discern’d the form one of one,

Whose voice seem’d faint through long disuse of speech.

When him in that great desert I espied,

“Have mercy on me!” cried I out aloud,

“Spirit! or living man! what e’er thou be!”

He answer’d: “Now not man, man once I was,

And born of Lombard parents, Mantuana both

By country, when the power of Julius yet

Was scarcely firm. At Rome my life was past

Beneath the mild Augustus, in the time

Of fabled deities and false. A bard

Was I, and made Anchises’ upright son

The subject of my song, who came from Troy,

When the flames prey’d on Ilium’s haughty towers.

But thou, say wherefore to such perils past

Return’st thou? wherefore not this pleasant mount

Ascendest, cause and source of all delight?”

“And art thou then that Virgil, that well-spring,

From which such copious floods of eloquence

Have issued?” I with front abash’d replied.

“Glory and light of all the tuneful train!

May it avail me that I long with zeal

Have sought thy volume, and with love immense

Have conn’d it o’er. My master thou and guide!

Thou he from whom alone I have deriv’d

That style, which for its beauty into fame

Exalts me. See the beast, from whom I fled.

O save me from her, thou illustrious sage!
“For every vein and pulse throughout my frame

She hath made tremble.” He, soon as he saw

That I was weeping, answer’d, “Thou must needs

Another way pursue, if thou wouldst ’scape

From out that savage wilderness. This beast,

At whom thou criest, her way will suffer none

To pass, and no less hindrance makes than death:

So bad and so accursed in her kind,

That never sated is her ravenous will,

Still after food more craving than before.

To many an animal in wedlock vile

She fastens, and shall yet to many more,

Until that greyhound come, who shall destroy

Her with sharp pain. He will not life support

By earth nor its base metals, but by love,

Wisdom, and virtue, and his land shall be

The land ’twixt either Feltro. In his might

Shall safety to Italia’s plains arise,

For whose fair realm, Camilla, virgin pure,

Nisus, Euryalus, and Turnus fell.

He with incessant chase through every town

Shall worry, until he to hell at length

Restore her, thence by envy first let loose.

I for thy profit pond’ring now devise,

That thou mayst follow me, and I thy guide

Will lead thee hence through an eternal space,

Where thou shalt hear despairing shrieks, and see

Spirits of old tormented, who invoke

A second death; and those next view, who dwell

Content in fire, for that they hope to come,

Whene’er the time may be, among the blest,

Into whose regions if thou then desire

T’ ascend, a spirit worthier than I

Must lead thee, in whose charge, when I depart,

Thou shalt be left: for that Almighty King,

Who reigns above, a rebel to his law,

Adjudges me, and therefore hath decreed,

That to his city none through me should come.

He in all parts hath sway; there rules, there holds

His citadel and throne. O happy those,

Whom there he chooses!” I to him in few:

“Bard! by that God, whom thou didst not adore,

I do beseech thee (that this ill and worse

I may escape) to lead me, where thou saidst,

That I Saint Peter’s gate may view, and those

Who as thou tell’st, are in such dismal plight.”

Onward he mov’d, I close his steps pursu’d.

CANTO II

Now was the day departing, and the air,

Imbrown’d with shadows, from their toils releas’d

All animals on earth; and I alone

Prepar’d myself the conflict to sustain,

Both of sad pity, and that perilous road,

Which my unerring memory shall retrace.

O Muses! O high genius! now vouchsafe

Your aid! O mind! that all I saw hast kept

Safe in a written record, here thy worth

And eminent endowments come to proof.

I thus began: “Bard! thou who art my guide,

Consider well, if virtue be in me

Sufficient, ere to this high enterprise

Thou trust me. Thou hast told that Silvius’ sire,

Yet cloth’d in corruptible flesh, among

Th’ immortal tribes had entrance, and was there

Sensible present. Yet if heaven’s great Lord,

Almighty foe to ill, such favour shew’d,

In contemplation of the high effect,

Both what and who from him should issue forth,

It seems in reason’s judgment well deserv’d:

Sith he of Rome, and of Rome’s empire wide,

In heaven’s empyreal height was chosen sire:

Both which, if truth be spoken, were ordain’d

And ’stablish’d for the holy place, where sits

Who to great Peter’s sacred chair succeeds.

He from this journey, in thy song renown’d,

Learn’d things, that to his victory gave rise

And to the papal robe. In after-times

The chosen vessel also travel’d there,

To bring us back assurance in that faith,

Which is the entrance to salvation’s way.

But I, why should I there presume? or who

Permits it? not Aeneas I nor Paul.

Myself I deem not worthy, and none else

Will deem me. I, if on this voyage then

I venture, fear it will in folly end.

Thou, who art wise, better my meaning know’st,

Than I can speak.” As one, who unresolves

What he hath late resolv’d, and with new thoughts

Changes his purpose, from his first intent

Remov’d; e’en such was I on that dun coast,

Wasting in thought my enterprise, at first

So eagerly embrac’d. “If right thy words

I scan,” replied that shade magnanimous,

“Thy soul is by vile fear assail’d, which oft

So overcasts a man, that he recoils

From noblest resolution, like a beast

At some false semblance in the twilight gloom.

That from this terror thou mayst free thyself,

I will instruct thee why I came, and what

I heard in that same instant, when for thee

Grief touch’d me first. I was among the tribe,

Who rest suspended, when a dame, so blest

And lovely, I besought her to command,

Call’d me; her eyes were brighter than the star

Of day; and she with gentle voice and soft

Angelically tun’d her speech address’d:

“O courteous shade of Mantua! thou whose fame

Yet lives, and shall live long as nature lasts!

A friend, not of my fortune but myself,

On the wide desert in his road has met

Hindrance so great, that he through fear has turn’d.

Now much I dread lest he past help have stray’d,

And I be ris’n too late for his relief,

From what in heaven of him I heard. Speed now,

And by thy eloquent persuasive tongue,

And by all means for his deliverance meet,

Assist him. So to me will comfort spring.

I who now bid thee on this errand forth

Am Beatrice; from a place I come.
(Note: Beatrice. I use this word, as it is

pronounced in the Italian, as consisting of four

syllables, of which the third is a long one.) Revisited with joy. Love brought me thence,

Who prompts my speech. When in my Master’s sight

I stand, thy praise to him I oft will tell.”

She then was silent, and I thus began:

“O Lady! by whose influence alone,

Mankind excels whatever is contain’d

Within that heaven which hath the smallest orb,

So thy command delights me, that to obey,

If it were done already, would seem late.

No need hast thou farther to speak thy will;

Yet tell the reason, why thou art not loth

To leave that ample space, where to return

Thou burnest, for this centre here beneath.”

She then: “Since thou so deeply wouldst inquire,

I will instruct thee briefly, why no dread

Hinders my entrance here. Those things alone

Are to be fear’d, whence evil may proceed,

None else, for none are terrible beside.

I am so fram’d by God, thanks to his grace!

That any suff’rance of your misery

Touches me not, nor flame of that fierce fire

Assails me. In high heaven a blessed dame

Besides, who mourns with such effectual grief

That hindrance, which I send thee to remove,

That God’s stern judgment to her will inclines.”

To Lucia calling, her she thus bespake:

“Now doth thy faithful servant need thy aid

And I commend him to thee.” At her word

Sped Lucia, of all cruelty the foe,

And coming to the place, where I abode

Seated with Rachel, her of ancient days,

She thus address’d me: “Thou true praise of God!

Beatrice! why is not thy succour lent

To him, who so much lov’d thee, as to leave

For thy sake all the multitude admires?

Dost thou not hear how pitiful his wail,

Nor mark the death, which in the torrent flood,

Swoln mightier than a sea, him struggling holds?”

Ne’er among men did any with such speed

Haste to their profit, flee from their annoy,

As when these words were spoken, I came here,

Down from my blessed seat, trusting the force

Of thy pure eloquence, which thee, and all

Who well have mark’d it, into honour brings.”

“When she had ended, her bright beaming eyes

Tearful she turn’d aside; whereat I felt

Redoubled zeal to serve thee. As she will’d,

Thus am I come: I sav’d thee from the beast,

Who thy near way across the goodly mount

Prevented. What is this comes o’er thee then?

Why, why dost thou hang back? why in thy breast

Harbour vile fear? why hast not courage there

And noble daring? Since three maids so blest

Thy safety plan, e’en in the court of heaven;

And so much certain good my words forebode.”

As florets, by the frosty air of night

Bent down and clos’d, when day has blanch’d their leaves,

Rise all unfolded on their spiry stems;

So was my fainting vigour new restor’d,

And to my heart such kindly courage ran,

That I as one undaunted soon replied:

“O full of pity she, who undertook

My succour! and thou kind who didst perform

So soon her true behest! With such desire

Thou hast dispos’d me to renew my voyage,

That my first purpose fully is resum’d.

Lead on: one only will is in us both.

Thou art my guide, my master thou, and lord.”

So spake I; and when he had onward mov’d,

I enter’d on the deep and woody way.

CANTO III

“Through me you pass into the city of woe:

Through me you pass into eternal pain:

Through me among the people lost for aye.

Justice the founder of my fabric mov’d:

To rear me was the task of power divine,

Supremest wisdom, and primeval love.

Before me things create were none, save things

Eternal, and eternal I endure.
“All hope abandon ye who enter here.”

Such characters in colour dim I mark’d

Over a portal’s lofty arch inscrib’d:

Whereat I thus: “Master, these words import

Hard meaning.” He as one prepar’d replied:

“Here thou must all distrust behind thee leave;

Here be vile fear extinguish’d. We are come

Where I have told thee we shall see the souls

To misery doom’d, who intellectual good

Have lost.” And when his hand he had stretch’d forth

To mine, with pleasant looks, whence I was cheer’d,

Into that secret place he led me on.

Here sighs with lamentations and loud moans

Resounded through the air pierc’d by no star,

That e’en I wept at entering. Various tongues,

Horrible languages, outcries of woe,

Accents of anger, voices deep and hoarse,

With hands together smote that swell’d the sounds,

Made up a tumult, that for ever whirls

Round through that air with solid darkness stain’d,

Like to the sand that in the whirlwind flies.

I then, with error yet encompass’d, cried:

“O master! What is this I hear? What race

Are these, who seem so overcome with woe?”

He thus to me: “This miserable fate

Suffer the wretched souls of those, who liv’d

Without or praise or blame, with that ill band

Of angels mix’d, who nor rebellious prov’d

Nor yet were true to God, but for themselves

Were only. From his bounds Heaven drove them forth,

Not to impair his lustre, nor the depth

Of Hell receives them, lest th’ accursed tribe

Should glory thence with exultation vain.”

I then: “Master! what doth aggrieve them thus,

That they lament so loud?” He straight replied:

“That will I tell thee briefly. These of death

No hope may entertain: and their blind life

So meanly passes, that all other lots

They envy. Fame of them the world hath none,

Nor suffers; mercy and justice scorn them both.

Speak not of them, but look, and pass them by.”

And I, who straightway look’d, beheld a flag,

Which whirling ran around so rapidly,

That it no pause obtain’d: and following came

Such a long train of spirits, I should ne’er

Have thought, that death so many had despoil’d.

When some of these I recogniz’d, I saw

And knew the shade of him, who to base fear

Yielding, abjur’d his high estate. Forthwith

I understood for certain this the tribe

Of those ill spirits both to God displeasing

And to his foes. These wretches, who ne’er lived,

Went on in nakedness, and sorely stung

By wasps and hornets, which bedew’d their cheeks

With blood, that mix’d with tears dropp’d to their feet,

And by disgustful worms was gather’d there.

Then looking farther onwards I beheld

A throng upon the shore of a great stream:

Whereat I thus: “Sir! grant me now to know

Whom here we view, and whence impell’d they seem

So eager to pass o’er, as I discern

Through the blear light?” He thus to me in few:

“This shalt thou know, soon as our steps arrive

Beside the woeful tide of Acheron.”

Then with eyes downward cast and fill’d with shame,

Fearing my words offensive to his ear,

Till we had reach’d the river, I from speech

Abstain’d. And lo! toward us in a bark

Comes on an old man hoary white with eld,
Crying, “Woe to you wicked spirits! hope not

Ever to see the sky again. I come

To take you to the other shore across,

Into eternal darkness, there to dwell

In fierce heat and in ice. And thou, who there

Standest, live spirit! get thee hence, and leave

These who are dead.” But soon as he beheld

I left them not, “By other way,” said he,

“By other haven shalt thou come to shore,

Not by this passage; thee a nimbler boat

Must carry.” Then to him thus spake my guide:

“Charon! thyself torment not: so ’t is will’d,

Where will and power are one: ask thou no more.”

Straightway in silence fell the shaggy cheeks

Of him the boatman o’er the livid lake,

Around whose eyes glar’d wheeling flames. Meanwhile

Those spirits, faint and naked, color chang’d,

And gnash’d their teeth, soon as the cruel words

They heard. God and their parents they blasphem’d,

The human kind, the place, the time, and seed

That did engender them and give them birth.

Then all together sorely wailing drew

To the curs’d strand, that every man must pass

Who fears not God. Charon, demoniac form,

With eyes of burning coal, collects them all,

Beck’ning, and each, that lingers, with his oar

Strikes. As fall off the light autumnal leaves,

One still another following, till the bough

Strews all its honours on the earth beneath;
E’en in like manner Adam’s evil brood

Cast themselves one by one down from the shore,

Each at a beck, as falcon at his call.

Thus go they over through the umber’d wave,

And ever they on the opposing bank

Be landed, on this side another throng

Still gathers. “Son,” thus spake the courteous guide,

“Those, who die subject to the wrath of God,

All here together come from every clime,

And to o’erpass the river are not loth:

For so heaven’s justice goads them on, that fear

Is turn’d into desire. Hence ne’er hath past

Good spirit. If of thee Charon complain,

Now mayst thou know the import of his words.”

This said, the gloomy region trembling shook

So terribly, that yet with clammy dews

Fear chills my brow. The sad earth gave a blast,

That, lightening, shot forth a vermilion flame,

Which all my senses conquer’d quite, and I

Down dropp’d, as one with sudden slumber seiz’d.

CANTO IV

Broke the deep slumber in my brain a crash

Of heavy thunder, that I shook myself,

As one by main force rous’d. Risen upright,

My rested eyes I mov’d around, and search’d

With fixed ken to know what place it was,

Wherein I stood. For certain on the brink

I found me of the lamentable vale,

The dread abyss, that joins a thund’rous sound

Of plaints innumerable. Dark and deep,

And thick with clouds o’erspread, mine eye in vain

Explor’d its bottom, nor could aught discern.

“Now let us to the blind world there beneath

Descend;” the bard began all pale of look:

“I go the first, and thou shalt follow next.”

Then I his alter’d hue perceiving, thus:

“How may I speed, if thou yieldest to dread,

Who still art wont to comfort me in doubt?”

He then: “The anguish of that race below

With pity stains my cheek, which thou for fear

Mistakest. Let us on. Our length of way

Urges to haste.” Onward, this said, he mov’d;

And ent’ring led me with him on the bounds

Of the first circle, that surrounds th’ abyss.

Here, as mine ear could note, no plaint was heard

Except of sighs, that made th’ eternal air

Tremble, not caus’d by tortures, but from grief

Felt by those multitudes, many and vast,

Of men, women, and infants. Then to me

The gentle guide: “Inquir’st thou not what spirits

Are these, which thou beholdest? Ere thou pass

Farther, I would thou know, that these of sin

Were blameless; and if aught they merited,

It profits not, since baptism was not theirs,

The portal to thy faith. If they before

The Gospel liv’d, they serv’d not God aright;

And among such am I. For these defects,

And for no other evil, we are lost;
“Only so far afflicted, that we live

Desiring without hope.” So grief assail’d

My heart at hearing this, for well I knew

Suspended in that Limbo many a soul

Of mighty worth. “O tell me, sire rever’d!

Tell me, my master!” I began through wish

Of full assurance in that holy faith,

Which vanquishes all error; “say, did e’er

Any, or through his own or other’s merit,

Come forth from thence, whom afterward was blest?”

Piercing the secret purport of my speech,

He answer’d: “I was new to that estate,

When I beheld a puissant one arrive

Amongst us, with victorious trophy crown’d.

He forth the shade of our first parent drew,

Abel his child, and Noah righteous man,

Of Moses lawgiver for faith approv’d,

Of patriarch Abraham, and David king,

Israel with his sire and with his sons,

Nor without Rachel whom so hard he won,

And others many more, whom he to bliss

Exalted. Before these, be thou assur’d,

No spirit of human kind was ever sav’d.”

We, while he spake, ceas’d not our onward road,

Still passing through the wood; for so I name

Those spirits thick beset. We were not far

On this side from the summit, when I kenn’d

A flame, that o’er the darken’d hemisphere

Prevailing shin’d. Yet we a little space

Were distant, not so far but I in part

Discover’d, that a tribe in honour high

That place possess’d. “O thou, who every art

And science valu’st! who are these, that boast

Such honour, separate from all the rest?”

He answer’d: “The renown of their great names

That echoes through your world above, acquires

Favour in heaven, which holds them thus advanc’d.”

Meantime a voice I heard: “Honour the bard

Sublime! his shade returns that left us late!”

No sooner ceas’d the sound, than I beheld

Four mighty spirits toward us bend their steps,

Of semblance neither sorrowful nor glad.

When thus my master kind began: “Mark him,

Who in his right hand bears that falchion keen,

The other three preceding, as their lord.

This is that Homer, of all bards supreme:

Flaccus the next in satire’s vein excelling;

The third is Naso; Lucan is the last.

Because they all that appellation own,

With which the voice singly accosted me,

Honouring they greet me thus, and well they judge.”
So I beheld united the bright school

Of him the monarch of sublimest song,

That o’er the others like an eagle soars.

When they together short discourse had held,

They turn’d to me, with salutation kind

Beck’ning me; at the which my master smil’d:

Nor was this all; but greater honour still

They gave me, for they made me of their tribe;

And I was sixth amid so learn’d a band.

Far as the luminous beacon on we pass’d

Speaking of matters, then befitting well

To speak, now fitter left untold. At foot

Of a magnificent castle we arriv’d,

Seven times with lofty walls begirt, and round

Defended by a pleasant stream. O’er this

As o’er dry land we pass’d. Next through seven gates

I with those sages enter’d, and we came

Into a mead with lively verdure fresh.

There dwelt a race, who slow their eyes around

Majestically mov’d, and in their port

Bore eminent authority; they spake

Seldom, but all their words were tuneful sweet.

We to one side retir’d, into a place

Open and bright and lofty, whence each one

Stood manifest to view. Incontinent

There on the green enamel of the plain

Were shown me the great spirits, by whose sight

I am exalted in my own esteem.

Electra there I saw accompanied

By many, among whom Hector I knew,

Anchises’ pious son, and with hawk’s eye

Caesar all arm’d, and by Camilla there

Penthesilea. On the other side

Old King Latinus, seated by his child

Lavinia, and that Brutus I beheld,

Who Tarquin chas’d, Lucretia, Cato’s wife

Marcia, with Julia and Cornelia there;

And sole apart retir’d, the Soldan fierce.

Then when a little more I rais’d my brow,

I spied the master of the sapient throng,

Seated amid the philosophic train.

Him all admire, all pay him rev’rence due.

There Socrates and Plato both I mark’d,

Nearest to him in rank; Democritus,

Who sets the world at chance, Diogenes,

With Heraclitus, and Empedocles,

And Anaxagoras, and Thales sage,

Zeno, and Dioscorides well read

In nature’s secret lore. Orpheus I mark’d

And Linus, Tully and moral Seneca,

Euclid and Ptolemy, Hippocrates,

Galenus, Avicen, and him who made

That commentary vast, Averroes.

Of all to speak at full were vain attempt;

For my wide theme so urges, that ofttimes

My words fall short of what bechanc’d. In two

The six associates part. Another way

My sage guide leads me, from that air serene,

Into a climate ever vex’d with storms:

And to a part I come where no light shines.

CANTO V

From the first circle I descended thus

Down to the second, which, a lesser space

Embracing, so much more of grief contains

Provoking bitter moans. There, Minos stands

Grinning with ghastly feature: he, of all

Who enter, strict examining the crimes,
Gives sentence, and dismisses them beneath,

According as he foldeth him around:

For when before him comes th’ ill fated soul,

It all confesses; and that judge severe

Of sins, considering what place in hell

Suits the transgression, with his tail so oft

Himself encircles, as degrees beneath

He dooms it to descend. Before him stand

Always a num’rous throng; and in his turn

Each one to judgment passing, speaks, and hears

His fate, thence downward to his dwelling hurl’d.

“O thou! who to this residence of woe

Approachest?” when he saw me coming, cried

Minos, relinquishing his dread employ,

“Look how thou enter here; beware in whom

Thou place thy trust; let not the entrance broad

Deceive thee to thy harm.” To him my guide:

“Wherefore exclaimest? Hinder not his way

By destiny appointed; so ’tis will’d

Where will and power are one. Ask thou no more.”

Now ’gin the rueful wailings to be heard.

Now am I come where many a plaining voice

Smites on mine ear. Into a place I came

Where light was silent all. Bellowing there groan’d

A noise as of a sea in tempest torn

By warring winds. The stormy blast of hell

With restless fury drives the spirits on

Whirl’d round and dash’d amain with sore annoy.
When they arrive before the ruinous sweep,

There shrieks are heard, there lamentations, moans,

And blasphemies ’gainst the good Power in heaven.

I understood that to this torment sad

The carnal sinners are condemn’d, in whom

Reason by lust is sway’d. As in large troops

And multitudinous, when winter reigns,

The starlings on their wings are borne abroad;

So bears the tyrannous gust those evil souls.

On this side and on that, above, below,

It drives them: hope of rest to solace them

Is none, nor e’en of milder pang. As cranes,

Chanting their dol’rous notes, traverse the sky,

Stretch’d out in long array: so I beheld

Spirits, who came loud wailing, hurried on

By their dire doom. Then I: “Instructor! who

Are these, by the black air so scourg’d?”—“The first

’Mong those, of whom thou question’st,” he replied,

“O’er many tongues was empress. She in vice

Of luxury was so shameless, that she made

Liking be lawful by promulg’d decree,

To clear the blame she had herself incurr’d.

This is Semiramis, of whom ’tis writ,

That she succeeded Ninus her espous’d;

And held the land, which now the Soldan rules.

The next in amorous fury slew herself,

And to Sicheus' ashes broke her faith:

Then follows Cleopatra, lustful queen."

There mark'd I Helen, for whose sake so long

The time was fraught with evil; there the great

Achilles, who with love fought to the end.

Paris I saw, and Tristan; and beside

A thousand more he show'd me, and by name

Pointed them out, whom love bereav'd of life.

When I had heard my sage instructor name

Those dames and knights of antique days, o'erpower'd

By pity, well-nigh in amaze my mind

Was lost; and I began: “Bard! willingly

I would address those two together coming,

Which seem so light before the wind.” He thus:

“Note thou, when nearer they to us approach.
“Then by that love which carries them along,

Entreat; and they will come.” Soon as the wind

Sway’d them toward us, I thus fram’d my speech:

“O wearied spirits! come, and hold discourse

With us, if by none else restrain’d.” As doves

By fond desire invited, on wide wings

And firm, to their sweet nest returning home,

Cleave the air, wafted by their will along;

Thus issu’d from that troop, where Dido ranks,

They through the ill air speeding; with such force

My cry prevail’d by strong affection urg’d.

“O gracious creature and benign! who go’st

Visiting, through this element obscure,

Us, who the world with bloody stain imbru’d;

If for a friend the King of all we own’d,

Our pray’r to him should for thy peace arise,

Since thou hast pity on our evil plight.

Of whatsoe’er to hear or to discourse

It pleases thee, that will we hear, of that

Freely with thee discourse, while e’er the wind,

As now, is mute. The land, that gave me birth,

Is situate on the coast, where Po descends

To rest in ocean with his sequent streams.

“Love, that in gentle heart is quickly learnt,

Entangled him by that fair form, from me

Ta’en in such cruel sort, as grieves me still:

Love, that denial takes from none belov’d,

Caught me with pleasing him so passing well,

That, as thou see’st, he yet deserts me not.
“Love brought us to one death: Caina waits

The soul, who spilt our life.” Such were their words;

At hearing which downward I bent my looks,

And held them there so long, that the bard cried:

“What art thou pond’ring?” I in answer thus:

“Alas! by what sweet thoughts, what fond desire

Must they at length to that ill pass have reach’d!”

Then turning, I to them my speech address’d.

And thus began: “Francesca! your sad fate

Even to tears my grief and pity moves.

But tell me; in the time of your sweet sighs,

By what, and how love granted, that ye knew

Your yet uncertain wishes?” She replied:

“No greater grief than to remember days

Of joy, when mis’ry is at hand! That kens

Thy learn’d instructor. Yet so eagerly

If thou art bent to know the primal root,

From whence our love gat being, I will do,

As one, who weeps and tells his tale. One day

For our delight we read of Lancelot,

How him love thrall’d. Alone we were, and no

Suspicion near us. Ofttimes by that reading

Our eyes were drawn together, and the hue

Fled from our alter’d cheek. But at one point

Alone we fell. When of that smile we read,

The wished smile, rapturously kiss’d

By one so deep in love, then he, who ne’er

From me shall separate, at once my lips

All trembling kiss’d. The book and writer both

Were love’s purveyors. In its leaves that day

We read no more.” While thus one spirit spake,

The other wail’d so sorely, that heartstruck

I through compassion fainting, seem’d not far

From death, and like a corpse fell to the ground.

CANTO VI

My sense reviving, that erewhile had droop’d

With pity for the kindred shades, whence grief

O’ercame me wholly, straight around I see

New torments, new tormented souls, which way

Soe’er I move, or turn, or bend my sight.

In the third circle I arrive, of show’rs

Ceaseless, accursed, heavy, and cold, unchang’d

For ever, both in kind and in degree.

Large hail, discolour’d water, sleety flaw

Through the dun midnight air stream’d down amain:

Stank all the land whereon that tempest fell.

Cerberus, cruel monster, fierce and strange,

Through his wide threefold throat barks as a dog

Over the multitude immers’d beneath.

His eyes glare crimson, black his unctuous beard,

His belly large, and claw’d the hands, with which

He tears the spirits, flays them, and their limbs

Piecemeal disparts. Howling there spread, as curs,

Under the rainy deluge, with one side

The other screening, oft they roll them round,

A wretched, godless crew. When that great worm

Descried us, savage Cerberus, he op’d

His jaws, and the fangs show’d us; not a limb

Of him but trembled. Then my guide, his palms

Expanding on the ground, thence filled with earth

Rais’d them, and cast it in his ravenous maw.
E’en as a dog, that yelling bays for food

His keeper, when the morsel comes, lets fall

His fury, bent alone with eager haste

To swallow it; so dropp’d the loathsome cheeks

Of demon Cerberus, who thund’ring stuns

The spirits, that they for deafness wish in vain.

We, o’er the shades thrown prostrate by the brunt

Of the heavy tempest passing, set our feet

Upon their emptiness, that substance seem’d.

They all along the earth extended lay

Save one, that sudden rais’d himself to sit,

Soon as that way he saw us pass. “O thou!”

He cried, “who through the infernal shades art led,

Own, if again thou know’st me. Thou wast fram’d

Or ere my frame was broken.” I replied:

“The anguish thou endur’st perchance so takes

Thy form from my remembrance, that it seems

As if I saw thee never. But inform

Me who thou art, that in a place so sad

Art set, and in such torment, that although

Other be greater, more disgustful none

Can be imagin’d.” He in answer thus:
“Thy city heap’d with envy to the brim,

Ay that the measure overflows its bounds,

Held me in brighter days. Ye citizens

Were wont to name me Ciacco. For the sin

Of glutt’ny, damned vice, beneath this rain,

E’en as thou see’st, I with fatigue am worn;

Nor I sole spirit in this woe: all these

Have by like crime incurr’d like punishment.”

No more he said, and I my speech resum’d:

“Ciacco! thy dire affliction grieves me much,

Even to tears. But tell me, if thou know’st,

What shall at length befall the citizens

Of the divided city; whether any just one

Inhabit there: and tell me of the cause,

Whence jarring discord hath assail’d it thus?”

He then: “After long striving they will come

To blood; and the wild party from the woods

Will chase the other with much injury forth.

Then it behoves, that this must fall, within

Three solar circles; and the other rise

By borrow’d force of one, who under shore

Now rests. It shall a long space hold aloof

Its forehead, keeping under heavy weight

The other oppress’d, indignant at the load,

And grieving sore. The just are two in number,

But they neglected. Av’rice, envy, pride,

Three fatal sparks, have set the hearts of all

On fire.” Here ceas’d the lamentable sound;

And I continu’d thus: “Still would I learn

More from thee, farther parley still entreat.

Of Farinata and Tegghiaio say,

They who so well deserv’d, of Giacopo,

Arrigo, Mosca, and the rest, who bent

Their minds on working good. Oh! tell me where

They bide, and to their knowledge let me come.

For I am press’d with keen desire to hear,

If heaven’s sweet cup or poisonous drug of hell

Be to their lip assign’d.” He answer’d straight:

“These are yet blacker spirits. Various crimes

Have sunk them deeper in the dark abyss.

If thou so far descendest, thou mayst see them.

But to the pleasant world when thou return’st,

Of me make mention, I entreat thee, there.

No more I tell thee, answer thee no more.”

This said, his fixed eyes he turn’d askance,

A little ey’d me, then bent down his head,

And ’midst his blind companions with it fell.

When thus my guide: “No more his bed he leaves,

Ere the last angel-trumpet blow. The Power

Adverse to these shall then in glory come,

Each one forthwith to his sad tomb repair,

Resume his fleshly vesture and his form,

And hear the eternal doom re-echoing rend

The vault.” So pass’d we through that mixture foul

Of spirits and rain, with tardy steps; meanwhile

Touching, though slightly, on the life to come.

For thus I question’d: “Shall these tortures, Sir!

When the great sentence passes, be increas’d,

Or mitigated, or as now severe?”

He then: “Consult thy knowledge; that decides

That as each thing to more perfection grows,

It feels more sensibly both good and pain.

Though ne’er to true perfection may arrive

This race accurs’d, yet nearer then than now

They shall approach it.” Compassing that path

Circuitous we journeyed, and discourse

Much more than I relate between us pass’d:

Till at the point, where the steps led below,

Arriv’d, there Plutus, the great foe, we found.

CANTO VII

“Ah me! O Satan! Satan!” loud exclaim’d

Plutus, in accent hoarse of wild alarm:

And the kind sage, whom no event surpris’d,

To comfort me thus spake: “Let not thy fear

Harm thee, for power in him, be sure, is none

To hinder down this rock thy safe descent.”

Then to that sworn lip turning, “Peace!” he cried,
“Curs’d wolf! thy fury inward on thyself

Prey, and consume thee! Through the dark profound

Not without cause he passes. So ’t is will’d

On high, there where the great Archangel pour’d

Heav’n’s vengeance on the first adulterer proud.”

As sails full spread and bellying with the wind

Drop suddenly collaps’d, if the mast split;

So to the ground down dropp’d the cruel fiend.

Thus we, descending to the fourth steep ledge,

Gain’d on the dismal shore, that all the woe

Hems in of all the universe. Ah me!

Almighty Justice! in what store thou heap’st

New pains, new troubles, as I here beheld!

Wherefore doth fault of ours bring us to this?

E’en as a billow, on Charybdis rising,

Against encounter’d billow dashing breaks;

Such is the dance this wretched race must lead,

Whom more than elsewhere numerous here I found,

From one side and the other, with loud voice,

Both roll’d on weights by main forge of their breasts,

Then smote together, and each one forthwith

Roll’d them back voluble, turning again,

Exclaiming these, “Why holdest thou so fast?”

Those answering, “And why castest thou away?”

So still repeating their despiteful song,

They to the opposite point on either hand

Travers’d the horrid circle: then arriv’d,

Both turn’d them round, and through the middle space

Conflicting met again. At sight whereof

I, stung with grief, thus spake: “O say, my guide!

What race is this? Were these, whose heads are shorn,

On our left hand, all sep’rate to the church?”

He straight replied: “In their first life these all

In mind were so distorted, that they made,

According to due measure, of their wealth,

No use. This clearly from their words collect,

Which they howl forth, at each extremity

Arriving of the circle, where their crime

Contrary in kind disparts them. To the church

Were separate those, that with no hairy cowls

Are crown’d, both Popes and Cardinals, o’er whom

Av’rice dominion absolute maintains.”

I then: “Mid such as these some needs must be,

Whom I shall recognize, that with the blot

Of these foul sins were stain’d.” He answering thus:

“Vain thought conceiv’st thou. That ignoble life,

Which made them vile before, now makes them dark,

And to all knowledge indiscernible.

Forever they shall meet in this rude shock:

These from the tomb with clenched grasp shall rise,

Those with close-shaven locks. That ill they gave,

And ill they kept, hath of the beauteous world

Depriv’d, and set them at this strife, which needs

No labour’d phrase of mine to set it off.

Now may’st thou see, my son! how brief, how vain,

The goods committed into fortune’s hands,

For which the human race keep such a coil!

Not all the gold, that is beneath the moon,

Or ever hath been, of these toil-worn souls

Might purchase rest for one.” I thus rejoin’d:
“My guide! of thee this also would I learn;

This fortune, that thou speak’st of, what it is,

Whose talons grasp the blessings of the world?”

He thus: “O beings blind! what ignorance

Besets you? Now my judgment hear and mark.

He, whose transcendent wisdom passes all,

The heavens creating, gave them ruling powers

To guide them, so that each part shines to each,

Their light in equal distribution pour’d.

By similar appointment he ordain’d

Over the world’s bright images to rule

Superintendence of a guiding hand

And general minister, which at due time

May change the empty vantages of life

From race to race, from one to other’s blood,

Beyond prevention of man’s wisest care:

Wherefore one nation rises into sway,

Another languishes, e’en as her will

Decrees, from us conceal’d, as in the grass

The serpent train. Against her nought avails

Your utmost wisdom. She with foresight plans,

Judges, and carries on her reign, as theirs

The other powers divine. Her changes know

None intermission: by necessity

She is made swift, so frequent come who claim

Succession in her favours. This is she,

So execrated e’en by those, whose debt

To her is rather praise; they wrongfully

With blame requite her, and with evil word;

But she is blessed, and for that recks not:

Amidst the other primal beings glad

Rolls on her sphere, and in her bliss exults.

Now on our way pass we, to heavier woe

Descending: for each star is falling now,

That mounted at our entrance, and forbids

Too long our tarrying.” We the circle cross’d

To the next steep, arriving at a well,

That boiling pours itself down to a foss

Sluic’d from its source. Far murkier was the wave

Than sablest grain: and we in company

Of the inky waters, journeying by their side,

Enter’d, though by a different track, beneath.

Into a lake, the Stygian nam’d, expands

The dismal stream, when it hath reach’d the foot

Of the grey wither’d cliffs. Intent I stood

To gaze, and in the marish sunk descried

A miry tribe, all naked, and with looks

Betok’ning rage. They with their hands alone

Struck not, but with the head, the breast, the feet,

Cutting each other piecemeal with their fangs.
The good instructor spake; “Now seest thou, son!

The souls of those, whom anger overcame.

This too for certain know, that underneath

The water dwells a multitude, whose sighs

Into these bubbles make the surface heave,

As thine eye tells thee wheresoe’er it turn.

Fix’d in the slime they say: ‘Sad once were we

In the sweet air made gladsome by the sun,

Carrying a foul and lazy mist within:

Now in these murky settlings are we sad.’

Such dolorous strain they gurgle in their throats.

But word distinct can utter none.” Our route

Thus compass’d we, a segment widely stretch’d

Between the dry embankment, and the core

Of the loath’d pool, turning meanwhile our eyes

Downward on those who gulp’d its muddy lees;

Nor stopp’d, till to a tower’s low base we came.

CANTO VIII

My theme pursuing, I relate that ere

We reach’d the lofty turret’s base, our eyes

Its height ascended, where two cressets hung

We mark’d, and from afar another light

Return the signal, so remote, that scarce

The eye could catch its beam. I turning round

To the deep source of knowledge, thus inquir’d:

“Say what this means? and what that other light

In answer set? what agency doth this?”

“There on the filthy waters,” he replied,

“E’en now what next awaits us mayst thou see,

If the marsh-gender’d fog conceal it not.”

Never was arrow from the cord dismiss’d,

That ran its way so nimbly through the air,

As a small bark, that through the waves I spied

Toward us coming, under the sole sway

Of one that ferried it, who cried aloud:

“Art thou arriv’d, fell spirit?”—“Phlegyas, Phlegyas,

This time thou criest in vain,” my lord replied;

“No longer shalt thou have us, but while o’er

The slimy pool we pass.” As one who hears

Of some great wrong he hath sustain’d, whereat

Inly he pines; so Phlegyas inly pin’d

In his fierce ire. My guide descending stepp’d

Into the skiff, and bade me enter next

Close at his side; nor till my entrance seem’d

The vessel freighted. Soon as both embark’d,

Cutting the waves, goes on the ancient prow,

More deeply than with others it is wont.
While we our course o’er the dead channel held.

One drench’d in mire before me came, and said;

“Who art thou, that thou comest ere thine hour?”

I answer’d: “Though I come, I tarry not;

But who art thou, that art become so foul?”

“One, as thou seest, who mourn:” he straight replied.

To which I thus: “In mourning and in woe,

Curs’d spirit! tarry thou. I know thee well,

E’en thus in filth disguis’d.” Then stretch’d he forth

Hands to the bark; whereof my teacher sage

Aware, thrusting him back: “Away! down there,
“To the other dogs!” then, with his arms my neck

Encircling, kiss’d my cheek, and spake: “O soul

Justly disdainful! blest was she in whom

Thou was conceiv’d! He in the world was one

For arrogance noted; to his memory

No virtue lends its lustre; even so

Here is his shadow furious. There above

How many now hold themselves mighty kings

Who here like swine shall wallow in the mire,

Leaving behind them horrible dispraise!”

I then: “Master! him fain would I behold

Whelm’d in these dregs, before we quit the lake.”

He thus: “Or ever to thy view the shore

Be offer’d, satisfied shall be that wish,

Which well deserves completion.” Scarce his words

Were ended, when I saw the miry tribes

Set on him with such violence, that yet

For that render I thanks to God and praise

“To Filippo Argenti:” cried they all:

And on himself the moody Florentine

Turn’d his avenging fangs. Him here we left,

Nor speak I of him more. But on mine ear

Sudden a sound of lamentation smote,

Whereat mine eye unbarr’d I sent abroad.

And thus the good instructor: “Now, my son!

Draws near the city, that of Dis is nam’d,

With its grave denizens, a mighty throng.”

I thus: “The minarets already, Sir!

There certes in the valley I descry,

Gleaming vermilion, as if they from fire

Had issu’d.” He replied: “Eternal fire,

That inward burns, shows them with ruddy flame

Illum’d; as in this nether hell thou seest.”

We came within the fosses deep, that moat

This region comfortless. The walls appear’d

As they were fram’d of iron. We had made

Wide circuit, ere a place we reach’d, where loud

The mariner cried vehement: “Go forth!

The entrance is here!” Upon the gates I spied

More than a thousand, who of old from heaven

Were hurl’d. With ireful gestures, “Who is this,”

They cried, “that without death first felt, goes through

The regions of the dead?” My sapient guide

Made sign that he for secret parley wish’d;

Whereat their angry scorn abating, thus

They spake: “Come thou alone; and let him go

Who hath so hardily enter’d this realm.

Alone return he by his witless way;

If well he know it, let him prove. For thee,

Here shalt thou tarry, who through clime so dark

Hast been his escort.” Now bethink thee, reader!

What cheer was mine at sound of those curs’d words.

I did believe I never should return.

“O my lov’d guide! who more than seven times

Security hast render’d me, and drawn

From peril deep, whereto I stood expos’d,

Desert me not,” I cried, “in this extreme.

And if our onward going be denied,

Together trace we back our steps with speed.”

My liege, who thither had conducted me,

Replied: “Fear not: for of our passage none

Hath power to disappoint us, by such high

Authority permitted. But do thou

Expect me here; meanwhile thy wearied spirit

Comfort, and feed with kindly hope, assur’d

I will not leave thee in this lower world.”

This said, departs the sire benevolent,

And quits me. Hesitating I remain

At war ’twixt will and will not in my thoughts.
I could not hear what terms he offer’d them,

But they conferr’d not long, for all at once

To trial fled within. Clos’d were the gates

By those our adversaries on the breast

Of my liege lord: excluded he return’d

To me with tardy steps. Upon the ground

His eyes were bent, and from his brow eras’d

All confidence, while thus with sighs he spake:

“Who hath denied me these abodes of woe?”

Then thus to me: “That I am anger’d, think

No ground of terror: in this trial I

Shall vanquish, use what arts they may within

For hindrance. This their insolence, not new,

Erewhile at gate less secret they display’d,

Which still is without bolt; upon its arch

Thou saw’st the deadly scroll: and even now

On this side of its entrance, down the steep,

Passing the circles, unescorted, comes

One whose strong might can open us this land.”

CANTO IX

The hue, which coward dread on my pale cheeks

Imprinted, when I saw my guide turn back,

Chas’d that from his which newly they had worn,

And inwardly restrain’d it. He, as one

Who listens, stood attentive: for his eye

Not far could lead him through the sable air,

And the thick-gath’ring cloud. “It yet behooves

We win this fight”—thus he began—“if not—

Such aid to us is offer’d.—Oh, how long

Me seems it, ere the promis’d help arrive!”

I noted, how the sequel of his words

Clok’d their beginning; for the last he spake

Agreed not with the first. But not the less

My fear was at his saying; sith I drew

To import worse perchance, than that he held,

His mutilated speech. “Doth ever any

Into this rueful concave’s extreme depth

Descend, out of the first degree, whose pain

Is deprivation merely of sweet hope?”

Thus I inquiring. “Rarely,” he replied,

“It chances, that among us any makes

This journey, which I wend. Erewhile ’tis true

Once came I here beneath, conjur’d by fell

Erictho, sorceress, who compell’d the shades

Back to their bodies. No long space my flesh

Was naked of me, when within these walls

She made me enter, to draw forth a spirit

From out of Judas’ circle. Lowest place

Is that of all, obscurest, and remov’d

Farthest from heav’n’s all-circling orb. The road

Full well I know: thou therefore rest secure.

That lake, the noisome stench exhaling, round

The city’ of grief encompasses, which now

We may not enter without rage.” Yet more

He added: but I hold it not in mind,

For that mine eye toward the lofty tower

Had drawn me wholly, to its burning top.

Where in an instant I beheld uprisen

At once three hellish furies stain’d with blood:

In limb and motion feminine they seem’d;

Around them greenest hydras twisting roll’d

Their volumes; adders and cerastes crept

Instead of hair, and their fierce temples bound.

He knowing well the miserable hags

Who tend the queen of endless woe, thus spake:
“Mark thou each dire Erinnys. To the left

This is Megaera; on the right hand she,

Who wails, Alecto; and Tisiphone

I’ th’ midst.” This said, in silence he remain’d

Their breast they each one clawing tore; themselves

Smote with their palms, and such shrill clamour rais’d,

That to the bard I clung, suspicion-bound.

“Hasten Medusa: so to adamant

Him shall we change;” all looking down exclaim’d.

“E’en when by Theseus’ might assail’d, we took

No ill revenge.” “Turn thyself round, and keep

Thy count’nance hid; for if the Gorgon dire

Be shown, and thou shouldst view it, thy return

Upwards would be for ever lost.” This said,

Himself my gentle master turn’d me round,

Nor trusted he my hands, but with his own

He also hid me. Ye of intellect

Sound and entire, mark well the lore conceal’d

Under close texture of the mystic strain!

And now there came o’er the perturbed waves

Loud-crashing, terrible, a sound that made

Either shore tremble, as if of a wind

Impetuous, from conflicting vapours sprung,

That ’gainst some forest driving all its might,

Plucks off the branches, beats them down and hurls

Afar; then onward passing proudly sweeps

Its whirlwind rage, while beasts and shepherds fly.

Mine eyes he loos’d, and spake: “And now direct

Thy visual nerve along that ancient foam,

There, thickest where the smoke ascends.” As frogs

Before their foe the serpent, through the wave

Ply swiftly all, till at the ground each one

Lies on a heap; more than a thousand spirits

Destroy’d, so saw I fleeing before one

Who pass’d with unwet feet the Stygian sound.

He, from his face removing the gross air,

Oft his left hand forth stretch’d, and seem’d alone

By that annoyance wearied. I perceiv’d

That he was sent from heav’n, and to my guide

Turn’d me, who signal made that I should stand

Quiet, and bend to him. Ah me! how full

Of noble anger seem’d he! To the gate

He came, and with his wand touch’d it, whereat

Open without impediment it flew.
“Outcasts of heav’n! O abject race and scorn’d!”

Began he on the horrid grunsel standing,

“Whence doth this wild excess of insolence

Lodge in you? wherefore kick you ’gainst that will

Ne’er frustrate of its end, and which so oft

Hath laid on you enforcement of your pangs?

What profits at the fays to but the horn?

Your Cerberus, if ye remember, hence

Bears still, peel’d of their hair, his throat and maw.”

This said, he turn’d back o’er the filthy way,

And syllable to us spake none, but wore

The semblance of a man by other care

Beset, and keenly press’d, than thought of him

Who in his presence stands. Then we our steps

Toward that territory mov’d, secure

After the hallow’d words. We unoppos’d

There enter’d; and my mind eager to learn

What state a fortress like to that might hold,

I soon as enter’d throw mine eye around,

And see on every part wide-stretching space

Replete with bitter pain and torment ill.

As where Rhone stagnates on the plains of Arles,

Or as at Pola, near Quarnaro’s gulf,

That closes Italy and laves her bounds,

The place is all thick spread with sepulchres;

So was it here, save what in horror here

Excell’d: for ’midst the graves were scattered flames,

Wherewith intensely all throughout they burn’d,

That iron for no craft there hotter needs.

Their lids all hung suspended, and beneath

From them forth issu’d lamentable moans,

Such as the sad and tortur’d well might raise.

I thus: “Master! say who are these, interr’d

Within these vaults, of whom distinct we hear

The dolorous sighs?” He answer thus return’d:
“The arch-heretics are here, accompanied

By every sect their followers; and much more,

Than thou believest, tombs are freighted: like

With like is buried; and the monuments

Are different in degrees of heat.” This said,

He to the right hand turning, on we pass’d

Betwixt the afflicted and the ramparts high.

CANTO X

Now by a secret pathway we proceed,

Between the walls, that hem the region round,

And the tormented souls: my master first,

I close behind his steps. “Virtue supreme!”

I thus began; “who through these ample orbs

In circuit lead’st me, even as thou will’st,

Speak thou, and satisfy my wish. May those,

Who lie within these sepulchres, be seen?

Already all the lids are rais’d, and none

O’er them keeps watch.” He thus in answer spake

“They shall be closed all, what-time they here

From Josaphat return’d shall come, and bring

Their bodies, which above they now have left.

The cemetery on this part obtain

With Epicurus all his followers,

Who with the body make the spirit die.

Here therefore satisfaction shall be soon

Both to the question ask’d, and to the wish,

Which thou conceal’st in silence.” I replied:

“I keep not, guide belov’d! from thee my heart

Secreted, but to shun vain length of words,

A lesson erewhile taught me by thyself.”

“O Tuscan! thou who through the city of fire

Alive art passing, so discreet of speech!

Here please thee stay awhile. Thy utterance

Declares the place of thy nativity

To be that noble land, with which perchance

I too severely dealt.” Sudden that sound

Forth issu’d from a vault, whereat in fear

I somewhat closer to my leader’s side

Approaching, he thus spake: “What dost thou? Turn.

Lo, Farinata, there! who hath himself

Uplifted: from his girdle upwards all

Expos’d behold him.” On his face was mine

Already fix’d; his breast and forehead there

Erecting, seem’d as in high scorn he held

E’en hell. Between the sepulchres to him

My guide thrust me with fearless hands and prompt,

This warning added: “See thy words be clear!”
He, soon as there I stood at the tomb’s foot,

Ey’d me a space, then in disdainful mood

Address’d me: “Say, what ancestors were thine?”

I, willing to obey him, straight reveal’d

The whole, nor kept back aught: whence he, his brow

Somewhat uplifting, cried: “Fiercely were they

Adverse to me, my party, and the blood

From whence I sprang: twice therefore I abroad

Scatter’d them.” “Though driv’n out, yet they each time

From all parts,” answer’d I, “return’d; an art

Which yours have shown, they are not skill’d to learn.”

Then, peering forth from the unclosed jaw,

Rose from his side a shade, high as the chin,

Leaning, methought, upon its knees uprais’d.

It look’d around, as eager to explore

If there were other with me; but perceiving

That fond imagination quench’d, with tears

Thus spake: “If thou through this blind prison go’st.

Led by thy lofty genius and profound,

Where is my son? and wherefore not with thee?”

I straight replied: “Not of myself I come,

By him, who there expects me, through this clime

Conducted, whom perchance Guido thy son

Had in contempt.” Already had his words

And mode of punishment read me his name,

Whence I so fully answer’d. He at once

Exclaim’d, up starting, “How! said’st thou he HAD?

No longer lives he? Strikes not on his eye

The blessed daylight?” Then of some delay

I made ere my reply aware, down fell

Supine, not after forth appear’d he more.

Meanwhile the other, great of soul, near whom

I yet was station’d, chang’d not count’nance stern,

Nor mov’d the neck, nor bent his ribbed side.

“And if,” continuing the first discourse,

“They in this art,” he cried, “small skill have shown,

That doth torment me more e’en than this bed.

But not yet fifty times shall be relum’d

Her aspect, who reigns here Queen of this realm,

Ere thou shalt know the full weight of that art.

So to the pleasant world mayst thou return,

As thou shalt tell me, why in all their laws,

Against my kin this people is so fell?”

“The slaughter and great havoc,” I replied,

“That colour’d Arbia’s flood with crimson stain—

To these impute, that in our hallow’d dome

Such orisons ascend.” Sighing he shook

The head, then thus resum’d: “In that affray

I stood not singly, nor without just cause

Assuredly should with the rest have stirr’d;

But singly there I stood, when by consent

Of all, Florence had to the ground been raz’d,

The one who openly forbad the deed.”

“So may thy lineage find at last repose,”

I thus adjur’d him, “as thou solve this knot,

Which now involves my mind. If right I hear,

Ye seem to view beforehand, that which time

Leads with him, of the present uninform’d.”

“We view, as one who hath an evil sight,”

He answer’d, “plainly, objects far remote:

So much of his large spendour yet imparts

The Almighty Ruler; but when they approach

Or actually exist, our intellect

Then wholly fails, nor of your human state

Except what others bring us know we aught.

Hence therefore mayst thou understand, that all

Our knowledge in that instant shall expire,

When on futurity the portals close.”

Then conscious of my fault, and by remorse

Smitten, I added thus: “Now shalt thou say

To him there fallen, that his offspring still

Is to the living join’d; and bid him know,

That if from answer silent I abstain’d,

’Twas that my thought was occupied intent

Upon that error, which thy help hath solv’d.”

But now my master summoning me back

I heard, and with more eager haste besought

The spirit to inform me, who with him

Partook his lot. He answer thus return’d:

“More than a thousand with me here are laid

Within is Frederick, second of that name,

And the Lord Cardinal, and of the rest

I speak not.” He, this said, from sight withdrew.

But I my steps towards the ancient bard

Reverting, ruminated on the words

Betokening me such ill. Onward he mov’d,

And thus in going question’d: “Whence the amaze

That holds thy senses wrapt?” I satisfied

The inquiry, and the sage enjoin’d me straight:

“Let thy safe memory store what thou hast heard

To thee importing harm; and note thou this,”

With his rais’d finger bidding me take heed,

“When thou shalt stand before her gracious beam,

Whose bright eye all surveys, she of thy life

The future tenour will to thee unfold.”

Forthwith he to the left hand turn’d his feet:

We left the wall, and tow’rds the middle space

Went by a path, that to a valley strikes;

Which e’en thus high exhal’d its noisome steam.

CANTO XI

Upon the utmost verge of a high bank,

By craggy rocks environ’d round, we came,

Where woes beneath more cruel yet were stow’d:

And here to shun the horrible excess

Of fetid exhalation, upward cast

From the profound abyss, behind the lid

Of a great monument we stood retir’d,
Whereon this scroll I mark’d: “I have in charge

Pope Anastasius, whom Photinus drew

From the right path.—Ere our descent behooves

We make delay, that somewhat first the sense,

To the dire breath accustom’d, afterward

Regard it not.” My master thus; to whom

Answering I spake: “Some compensation find

That the time past not wholly lost.” He then:

“Lo! how my thoughts e’en to thy wishes tend!

My son! within these rocks,” he thus began,

“Are three close circles in gradation plac’d,

As these which now thou leav’st. Each one is full

Of spirits accurs’d; but that the sight alone

Hereafter may suffice thee, listen how

And for what cause in durance they abide.

“Of all malicious act abhorr’d in heaven,

The end is injury; and all such end

Either by force or fraud works other’s woe

But fraud, because of man peculiar evil,

To God is more displeasing; and beneath

The fraudulent are therefore doom’d to’ endure

Severer pang. The violent occupy

All the first circle; and because to force

Three persons are obnoxious, in three rounds

Each within other sep’rate is it fram’d.

To God, his neighbour, and himself, by man

Force may be offer’d; to himself I say

And his possessions, as thou soon shalt hear

At full. Death, violent death, and painful wounds

Upon his neighbour he inflicts; and wastes

By devastation, pillage, and the flames,

His substance. Slayers, and each one that smites

In malice, plund’rers, and all robbers, hence

The torment undergo of the first round

In different herds. Man can do violence

To himself and his own blessings: and for this

He in the second round must aye deplore

With unavailing penitence his crime,

Whoe’er deprives himself of life and light,

In reckless lavishment his talent wastes,

And sorrows there where he should dwell in joy.

To God may force be offer’d, in the heart

Denying and blaspheming his high power,

And nature with her kindly law contemning.

And thence the inmost round marks with its seal

Sodom and Cahors, and all such as speak

Contemptuously of the Godhead in their hearts.

“Fraud, that in every conscience leaves a sting,

May be by man employ’d on one, whose trust

He wins, or on another who withholds

Strict confidence. Seems as the latter way

Broke but the bond of love which Nature makes.

Whence in the second circle have their nest

Dissimulation, witchcraft, flatteries,

Theft, falsehood, simony, all who seduce

To lust, or set their honesty at pawn,

With such vile scum as these. The other way

Forgets both Nature’s general love, and that

Which thereto added afterwards gives birth

To special faith. Whence in the lesser circle,

Point of the universe, dread seat of Dis,

The traitor is eternally consum’d.”

I thus: “Instructor, clearly thy discourse

Proceeds, distinguishing the hideous chasm

And its inhabitants with skill exact.

But tell me this: they of the dull, fat pool,

Whom the rain beats, or whom the tempest drives,

Or who with tongues so fierce conflicting meet,

Wherefore within the city fire-illum'd

Are not these punish'd, if God's wrath be on them?

And if it be not, wherefore in such guise

Are they condemned?" He answer thus return'd:

"Wherefore in dotage wanders thus thy mind,

Not so accustom'd? or what other thoughts

Possess it? Dwell not in thy memory

The words, wherein thy ethic page describes

Three dispositions adverse to Heav'n's will,

Incont'nence, malice, and mad brutishness,

And how incontinence the least offends

God, and least guilt incurs? If well thou note

This judgment, and remember who they are,

Without these walls to vain repentance doom’d,

Thou shalt discern why they apart are plac’d

From these fell spirits, and less wreakful pours

Justice divine on them its vengeance down.”

“O Sun! who healest all imperfect sight,

Thou so content’st me, when thou solv’st my doubt,

That ignorance not less than knowledge charms.

Yet somewhat turn thee back,” I in these words

Continu’d, “where thou saidst, that usury

Offends celestial Goodness; and this knot

Perplex’d unravel.” He thus made reply:

“Philosophy, to an attentive ear,

Clearly points out, not in one part alone,

How imitative nature takes her course

From the celestial mind and from its art:

And where her laws the Stagyrite unfolds,

Not many leaves scann’d o’er, observing well

Thou shalt discover, that your art on her

Obsequious follows, as the learner treads

In his instructor’s step, so that your art

Deserves the name of second in descent

From God. These two, if thou recall to mind

Creation’s holy book, from the beginning

Were the right source of life and excellence

To human kind. But in another path

The usurer walks; and Nature in herself

And in her follower thus he sets at nought,

Placing elsewhere his hope. But follow now

My steps on forward journey bent; for now

The Pisces play with undulating glance

Along the horizon, and the Wain lies all

O’er the north-west; and onward there a space

Is our steep passage down the rocky height.”

CANTO XII

The place where to descend the precipice

We came, was rough as Alp, and on its verge

Such object lay, as every eye would shun.

As is that ruin, which Adice’s stream

On this side Trento struck, should’ring the wave,

Or loos’d by earthquake or for lack of prop;

For from the mountain’s summit, whence it mov’d

To the low level, so the headlong rock

Is shiver’d, that some passage it might give

To him who from above would pass; e’en such

Into the chasm was that descent: and there

At point of the disparted ridge lay stretch’d

The infamy of Crete, detested brood

Of the feign’d heifer: and at sight of us

It gnaw’d itself, as one with rage distract.
To him my guide exclaim’d: “Perchance thou deem’st

The King of Athens here, who, in the world

Above, thy death contriv’d. Monster! avaunt!

He comes not tutor’d by thy sister’s art,

But to behold your torments is he come.”

Like to a bull, that with impetuous spring

Darts, at the moment when the fatal blow

Hath struck him, but unable to proceed

Plunges on either side; so saw I plunge

The Minotaur; whereat the sage exclaim’d:

“Run to the passage! while he storms, ’t is well

That thou descend.” Thus down our road we took

Through those dilapidated crags, that oft

Mov’d underneath my feet, to weight like theirs

Unus’d. I pond’ring went, and thus he spake:

“Perhaps thy thoughts are of this ruin’d steep,

Guarded by the brute violence, which I

Have vanquish’d now. Know then, that when I erst

Hither descended to the nether hell,

This rock was not yet fallen. But past doubt

(If well I mark) not long ere He arrived,

Who carried off from Dis the mighty spoil

Of the highest circle, then through all its bounds

Such trembling seiz’d the deep concave and foul,

I thought the universe was thrill’d with love,

Whereby, there are who deem, the world hath oft

Been into chaos turn’d: and in that point,

Here, and elsewhere, that old rock toppled down.

But fix thine eyes beneath: the river of blood

Approaches, in the which all those are steep’d,

Who have by violence injur’d.” O blind lust!

O foolish wrath! who so dost goad us on

In the brief life, and in the eternal then

Thus miserably o’erwhelm us. I beheld

An ample foss, that in a bow was bent,

As circling all the plain; for so my guide

Had told. Between it and the rampart’s base

On trail ran Centaurs, with keen arrows arm’d,

As to the chase they on the earth were wont.
At seeing us descend they each one stood;

And issuing from the troop, three sped with bows

And missile weapons chosen first; of whom

One cried from far: “Say to what pain ye come

Condemn’d, who down this steep have journied? Speak

From whence ye stand, or else the bow I draw.”

To whom my guide: “Our answer shall be made

To Chiron, there, when nearer him we come.

Ill was thy mind, thus ever quick and rash.”

Then me he touch’d, and spake: “Nessus is this,

Who for the fair Deianira died,

And wrought himself revenge for his own fate.

He in the midst, that on his breast looks down,

Is the great Chiron who Achilles nurs’d;

That other Pholus, prone to wrath.” Around

The foss these go by thousands, aiming shafts

At whatsoever spirit dares emerge

From out the blood, more than his guilt allows.
We to those beasts, that rapid strode along,

Drew near, when Chiron took an arrow forth,

And with the notch push’d back his shaggy beard

To the cheek-bone, then his great mouth to view

Exposing, to his fellows thus exclaim’d:

“Are ye aware, that he who comes behind

Moves what he touches? The feet of the dead

Are not so wont.” My trusty guide, who now

Stood near his breast, where the two natures join,

Thus made reply: “He is indeed alive,

And solitary so must needs by me

Be shown the gloomy vale, thereto induc’d

By strict necessity, not by delight.

She left her joyful harpings in the sky,

Who this new office to my care consign’d.

He is no robber, no dark spirit I.

But by that virtue, which empowers my step

To treat so wild a path, grant us, I pray,

One of thy band, whom we may trust secure,

Who to the ford may lead us, and convey

Across, him mounted on his back; for he

Is not a spirit that may walk the air.”

Then on his right breast turning, Chiron thus

To Nessus spake: “Return, and be their guide.

And if ye chance to cross another troop,

Command them keep aloof.” Onward we mov’d,

The faithful escort by our side, along

The border of the crimson-seething flood,

Whence from those steep’d within loud shrieks arose.

Some there I mark’d, as high as to their brow

Immers’d, of whom the mighty Centaur thus:

“These are the souls of tyrants, who were given

To blood and rapine. Here they wail aloud

Their merciless wrongs. Here Alexander dwells,

And Dionysius fell, who many a year

Of woe wrought for fair Sicily. That brow

Whereon the hair so jetty clust’ring hangs,

Is Azzolino; that with flaxen locks

Obizzo’ of Este, in the world destroy’d

By his foul step-son.” To the bard rever’d

I turned me round, and thus he spake; “Let him

Be to thee now first leader, me but next

To him in rank.” Then farther on a space

The Centaur paus’d, near some, who at the throat

Were extant from the wave; and showing us

A spirit by itself apart retir’d,

Exclaim’d: “He in God’s bosom smote the heart,

Which yet is honour’d on the bank of Thames.”

A race I next espied, who held the head,

And even all the bust above the stream.

’Midst these I many a face remember’d well.

Thus shallow more and more the blood became,

So that at last it but imbru’d the feet;

And there our passage lay athwart the foss.

“As ever on this side the boiling wave

Thou seest diminishing,” the Centaur said,

“So on the other, be thou well assur’d,

It lower still and lower sinks its bed,

Till in that part it reuniting join,

Where ’t is the lot of tyranny to mourn.

There Heav’n’s stern justice lays chastising hand

On Attila, who was the scourge of earth,

On Sextus, and on Pyrrhus, and extracts

Tears ever by the seething flood unlock’d

From the Rinieri, of Corneto this,

Pazzo the other nam’d, who fill’d the ways

With violence and war.” This said, he turn’d,

And quitting us, alone repass’d the ford.

CANTO XIII

Ere Nessus yet had reach’d the other bank,

We enter’d on a forest, where no track

Of steps had worn a way. Not verdant there

The foliage, but of dusky hue; not light

The boughs and tapering, but with knares deform’d

And matted thick: fruits there were none, but thorns

Instead, with venom fill’d. Less sharp than these,

Less intricate the brakes, wherein abide

Those animals, that hate the cultur’d fields,

Betwixt Corneto and Cecina’s stream.
Here the brute Harpies make their nest, the same

Who from the Strophades the Trojan band

Drove with dire boding of their future woe.

Broad are their pennons, of the human form

Their neck and count’nance, arm’d with talons keen

The feet, and the huge belly fledge with wings

These sit and wail on the drear mystic wood.

The kind instructor in these words began:

“Ere farther thou proceed, know thou art now

I’ th’ second round, and shalt be, till thou come

Upon the horrid sand: look therefore well

Around thee, and such things thou shalt behold,

As would my speech discredit.” On all sides

I heard sad plainings breathe, and none could see

From whom they might have issu’d. In amaze

Fast bound I stood. He, as it seem’d, believ’d,

That I had thought so many voices came

From some amid those thickets close conceal’d,

And thus his speech resum’d: “If thou lop off

A single twig from one of those ill plants,

The thought thou hast conceiv’d shall vanish quite.”

Thereat a little stretching forth my hand,

From a great wilding gather’d I a branch,

And straight the trunk exclaim’d: “Why pluck’st thou me?”
Then as the dark blood trickled down its side,

These words it added: “Wherefore tear’st me thus?

Is there no touch of mercy in thy breast?

Men once were we, that now are rooted here.

Thy hand might well have spar’d us, had we been

The souls of serpents.” As a brand yet green,

That burning at one end from the other sends

A groaning sound, and hisses with the wind

That forces out its way, so burst at once,

Forth from the broken splinter words and blood.

I, letting fall the bough, remain’d as one

Assail’d by terror, and the sage replied:

“If he, O injur’d spirit! could have believ’d

What he hath seen but in my verse describ’d,

He never against thee had stretch’d his hand.

But I, because the thing surpass’d belief,

Prompted him to this deed, which even now

Myself I rue. But tell me, who thou wast;

That, for this wrong to do thee some amends,

In the upper world (for thither to return

Is granted him) thy fame he may revive.”

“That pleasant word of thine,” the trunk replied

“Hath so inveigled me, that I from speech

Cannot refrain, wherein if I indulge

A little longer, in the snare detain’d,

Count it not grievous. I it was, who held

Both keys to Frederick’s heart, and turn’d the wards,

Opening and shutting, with a skill so sweet,

That besides me, into his inmost breast

Scarce any other could admittance find.

The faith I bore to my high charge was such,

It cost me the life-blood that warm'd my veins.

The harlot, who ne'er turn'd her gloating eyes

From Caesar's household, common vice and pest

Of courts, 'gainst me inflam'd the minds of all;

And to Augustus they so spread the flame,

That my glad honours chang'd to bitter woes.

My soul, disdainful and disgusted, sought

Refuge in death from scorn, and I became,

Just as I was, unjust toward myself.

By the new roots, which fix this stem, I swear,

That never faith I broke to my liege lord,

Who merited such honour; and of you,

If any to the world indeed return,

Clear he from wrong my memory, that lies

Yet prostrate under envy’s cruel blow.”

First somewhat pausing, till the mournful words

Were ended, then to me the bard began:

“Lose not the time; but speak and of him ask,

If more thou wish to learn.” Whence I replied:

“Question thou him again of whatsoe’er

Will, as thou think’st, content me; for no power

Have I to ask, such pity’ is at my heart.”

He thus resum’d; “So may he do for thee

Freely what thou entreatest, as thou yet

Be pleas’d, imprison’d Spirit! to declare,

How in these gnarled joints the soul is tied;

And whether any ever from such frame

Be loosen’d, if thou canst, that also tell.”

Thereat the trunk breath’d hard, and the wind soon

Chang’d into sounds articulate like these;

Briefly ye shall be answer’d. “When departs

The fierce soul from the body, by itself

Thence torn asunder, to the seventh gulf

By Minos doom’d, into the wood it falls,

No place assign’d, but wheresoever chance

Hurls it, there sprouting, as a grain of spelt,

It rises to a sapling, growing thence

A savage plant. The Harpies, on its leaves

Then feeding, cause both pain and for the pain

A vent to grief. We, as the rest, shall come

For our own spoils, yet not so that with them

We may again be clad; for what a man

Takes from himself it is not just he have.

Here we perforce shall drag them; and throughout

The dismal glade our bodies shall be hung,

Each on the wild thorn of his wretched shade.”

Attentive yet to listen to the trunk

We stood, expecting farther speech, when us

A noise surpris’d, as when a man perceives

The wild boar and the hunt approach his place

Of station’d watch, who of the beasts and boughs

Loud rustling round him hears. And lo! there came

Two naked, torn with briers, in headlong flight,

That they before them broke each fan o’ th’ wood.

“Haste now,” the foremost cried, “now haste thee death!”
The other, as seem’d, impatient of delay

Exclaiming, “Lano! not so bent for speed

Thy sinews, in the lists of Toppo’s field.”

And then, for that perchance no longer breath

Suffic’d him, of himself and of a bush

One group he made. Behind them was the wood

Full of black female mastiffs, gaunt and fleet,

As greyhounds that have newly slipp’d the leash.

On him, who squatted down, they stuck their fangs,

And having rent him piecemeal bore away

The tortur’d limbs. My guide then seiz’d my hand,

And led me to the thicket, which in vain

Mourn’d through its bleeding wounds: “O Giacomo

Of Sant’ Andrea! what avails it thee,”

It cried, “that of me thou hast made thy screen?

For thy ill life what blame on me recoils?”

When o’er it he had paus’d, my master spake:

“Say who wast thou, that at so many points

Breath’st out with blood thy lamentable speech?”

He answer’d: “Oh, ye spirits: arriv’d in time

To spy the shameful havoc, that from me

My leaves hath sever’d thus, gather them up,

And at the foot of their sad parent-tree

Carefully lay them. In that city’ I dwelt,

Who for the Baptist her first patron chang’d,

Whence he for this shall cease not with his art

To work her woe: and if there still remain’d not

On Arno’s passage some faint glimpse of him,

Those citizens, who rear’d once more her walls

Upon the ashes left by Attila,

Had labour’d without profit of their toil.

I slung the fatal noose from my own roof.”

CANTO XIV

Soon as the charity of native land

Wrought in my bosom, I the scatter’d leaves

Collected, and to him restor’d, who now

Was hoarse with utt’rance. To the limit thence

We came, which from the third the second round

Divides, and where of justice is display’d

Contrivance horrible. Things then first seen

Clearlier to manifest, I tell how next

A plain we reach’d, that from its sterile bed

Each plant repell’d. The mournful wood waves round

Its garland on all sides, as round the wood

Spreads the sad foss. There, on the very edge,

Our steps we stay’d. It was an area wide

Of arid sand and thick, resembling most

The soil that erst by Cato’s foot was trod.

Vengeance of Heav’n! Oh! how shouldst thou be fear’d

By all, who read what here my eyes beheld!

Of naked spirits many a flock I saw,

All weeping piteously, to different laws

Subjected: for on the earth some lay supine,

Some crouching close were seated, others pac’d

Incessantly around; the latter tribe,

More numerous, those fewer who beneath

The torment lay, but louder in their grief.

O’er all the sand fell slowly wafting down

Dilated flakes of fire, as flakes of snow

On Alpine summit, when the wind is hush’d.

As in the torrid Indian clime, the son

Of Ammon saw upon his warrior band

Descending, solid flames, that to the ground

Came down: whence he bethought him with his troop

To trample on the soil; for easier thus

The vapour was extinguish’d, while alone;

So fell the eternal fiery flood, wherewith

The marble glow’d underneath, as under stove

The viands, doubly to augment the pain.
Unceasing was the play of wretched hands,

Now this, now that way glancing, to shake off

The heat, still falling fresh. I thus began:

“Instructor! thou who all things overcom’st,

Except the hardy demons, that rush’d forth

To stop our entrance at the gate, say who

Is yon huge spirit, that, as seems, heeds not

The burning, but lies writhen in proud scorn,

As by the sultry tempest immatur’d?”

Straight he himself, who was aware I ask’d

My guide of him, exclaim’d: “Such as I was

When living, dead such now I am. If Jove

Weary his workman out, from whom in ire

He snatch’d the lightnings, that at my last day

Transfix’d me, if the rest be weary out

At their black smithy labouring by turns

In Mongibello, while he cries aloud;

“Help, help, good Mulciber!” as erst he cried

In the Phlegraean warfare, and the bolts

Launch he full aim’d at me with all his might,

He never should enjoy a sweet revenge.”

Then thus my guide, in accent higher rais’d

Than I before had heard him: “Capaneus!

Thou art more punish’d, in that this thy pride

Lives yet unquench’d: no torrent, save thy rage,

Were to thy fury pain proportion’d full.”

Next turning round to me with milder lip

He spake: “This of the seven kings was one,

Who girt the Theban walls with siege, and held,

As still he seems to hold, God in disdain,

And sets his high omnipotence at nought.

But, as I told him, his despiteful mood

Is ornament well suits the breast that wears it.

Follow me now; and look thou set not yet

Thy foot in the hot sand, but to the wood

Keep ever close.” Silently on we pass’d

To where there gushes from the forest’s bound

A little brook, whose crimson’d wave yet lifts

My hair with horror. As the rill, that runs

From Bulicame, to be portion’d out

Among the sinful women; so ran this

Down through the sand, its bottom and each bank

Stone-built, and either margin at its side,

Whereon I straight perceiv’d our passage lay.

“Of all that I have shown thee, since that gate

We enter’d first, whose threshold is to none

Denied, nought else so worthy of regard,

As is this river, has thine eye discern’d,

O’er which the flaming volley all is quench’d.”

So spake my guide; and I him thence besought,

That having giv’n me appetite to know,

The food he too would give, that hunger crav’d.

“In midst of ocean,” forthwith he began,

“A desolate country lies, which Crete is nam’d,

Under whose monarch in old times the world

Liv’d pure and chaste. A mountain rises there,

Call’d Ida, joyous once with leaves and streams,

Deserted now like a forbidden thing.

It was the spot which Rhea, Saturn’s spouse,

Chose for the secret cradle of her son;

And better to conceal him, drown’d in shouts

His infant cries. Within the mount, upright

An ancient form there stands and huge, that turns

His shoulders towards Damiata, and at Rome

As in his mirror looks. Of finest gold

His head is shap’d, pure silver are the breast

And arms; thence to the middle is of brass.

And downward all beneath well-temper’d steel,

Save the right foot of potter’s clay, on which

Than on the other more erect he stands,

Each part except the gold, is rent throughout;

And from the fissure tears distil, which join’d

Penetrate to that cave. They in their course

Thus far precipitated down the rock

Form Acheron, and Styx, and Phlegethon;

Then by this straiten’d channel passing hence

Beneath, e’en to the lowest depth of all,

Form there Cocytus, of whose lake (thyself

Shall see it) I here give thee no account.”

Then I to him: “If from our world this sluice

Be thus deriv’d; wherefore to us but now

Appears it at this edge?" He straight replied:

"The place, thou know'st, is round; and though great part

Thou have already pass'd, still to the left

Descending to the nethermost, not yet

Hast thou the circuit made of the whole orb.

Wherefore if aught of new to us appear,

It needs not bring up wonder in thy looks."

Then I again inquir'd: "Where flow the streams

Of Phlegethon and Lethe? for of one

Thou tell'st not, and the other of that shower,

Thou say'st, is form'd." He answer thus return'd:

"Doubtless thy questions all well pleas'd I hear.

Yet the red seething wave might have resolv'd

One thou proposest. Lethe thou shalt see,

But not within this hollow, in the place,

Whither to lave themselves the spirits go,

Whose blame hath been by penitence remov’d.”

He added: “Time is now we quit the wood.

Look thou my steps pursue: the margins give

Safe passage, unimpeded by the flames;

For over them all vapour is extinct.”

CANTO XV

One of the solid margins bears us now

Envelop’d in the mist, that from the stream

Arising, hovers o’er, and saves from fire

Both piers and water. As the Flemings rear

Their mound, ’twixt Ghent and Bruges, to chase back

The ocean, fearing his tumultuous tide

That drives toward them, or the Paduans theirs

Along the Brenta, to defend their towns

And castles, ere the genial warmth be felt

On Chiarentana’s top; such were the mounds,

So fram’d, though not in height or bulk to these

Made equal, by the master, whosoe’er

He was, that rais’d them here. We from the wood

Were not so far remov’d, that turning round

I might not have discern’d it, when we met

A troop of spirits, who came beside the pier.

They each one ey’d us, as at eventide

One eyes another under a new moon,

And toward us sharpen’d their sight as keen,

As an old tailor at his needle’s eye.

Thus narrowly explor’d by all the tribe,

I was agniz’d of one, who by the skirt

Caught me, and cried, “What wonder have we here!”

And I, when he to me outstretch’d his arm,

Intently fix’d my ken on his parch’d looks,

That although smirch’d with fire, they hinder’d not

But I remember’d him; and towards his face

My hand inclining, answer’d: “Sir! Brunetto!
“And art thou here?” He thus to me: “My son!

Oh let it not displease thee, if Brunetto

Latini but a little space with thee

Turn back, and leave his fellows to proceed.”

I thus to him replied: “Much as I can,

I thereto pray thee; and if thou be willing,

That I here seat me with thee, I consent;

His leave, with whom I journey, first obtain’d.”

“O son!” said he, “whoever of this throng

One instant stops, lies then a hundred years,

No fan to ventilate him, when the fire

Smites sorest. Pass thou therefore on. I close

Will at thy garments walk, and then rejoin

My troop, who go mourning their endless doom.”

I dar’d not from the path descend to tread

On equal ground with him, but held my head

Bent down, as one who walks in reverent guise.

“What chance or destiny,” thus he began,

“Ere the last day conducts thee here below?

And who is this, that shows to thee the way?”

“There up aloft,” I answer’d, “in the life

Serene, I wander’d in a valley lost,

Before mine age had to its fullness reach’d.

But yester-morn I left it: then once more

Into that vale returning, him I met;

And by this path homeward he leads me back.”

“If thou,” he answer’d, “follow but thy star,

Thou canst not miss at last a glorious haven:

Unless in fairer days my judgment err’d.

And if my fate so early had not chanc’d,

Seeing the heav’ns thus bounteous to thee, I

Had gladly giv’n thee comfort in thy work.

But that ungrateful and malignant race,

Who in old times came down from Fesole,

Ay and still smack of their rough mountain-flint,

Will for thy good deeds shew thee enmity.

Nor wonder; for amongst ill-savour’d crabs

It suits not the sweet fig-tree lay her fruit.

Old fame reports them in the world for blind,

Covetous, envious, proud. Look to it well:

Take heed thou cleanse thee of their ways. For thee

Thy fortune hath such honour in reserve,

That thou by either party shalt be crav’d

With hunger keen: but be the fresh herb far

From the goat’s tooth. The herd of Fesole

May of themselves make litter, not touch the plant,

If any such yet spring on their rank bed,

In which the holy seed revives, transmitted

From those true Romans, who still there remain’d,

When it was made the nest of so much ill.”

“Were all my wish fulfill’d,” I straight replied,

“Thou from the confines of man’s nature yet

Hadst not been driven forth; for in my mind

Is fix’d, and now strikes full upon my heart

The dear, benign, paternal image, such

As thine was, when so lately thou didst teach me

The way for man to win eternity;

And how I priz’d the lesson, it behooves,

That, long as life endures, my tongue should speak,

What of my fate thou tell’st, that write I down:

And with another text to comment on

For her I keep it, the celestial dame,

Who will know all, if I to her arrive.

This only would I have thee clearly note:

That so my conscience have no plea against me;

Do fortune as she list, I stand prepar’d.

Not new or strange such earnest to mine ear.

Speed fortune then her wheel, as likes her best,

The clown his mattock; all things have their course.”

Thereat my sapient guide upon his right

Turn’d himself back, then look’d at me and spake:

“He listens to good purpose who takes note.”

I not the less still on my way proceed,

Discoursing with Brunetto, and inquire

Who are most known and chief among his tribe.

“To know of some is well;” thus he replied,

“But of the rest silence may best beseem.

Time would not serve us for report so long.

In brief I tell thee, that all these were clerks,

Men of great learning and no less renown,

By one same sin polluted in the world.

With them is Priscian, and Accorso’s son

Francesco herds among that wretched throng:

And, if the wish of so impure a blotch

Possess’d thee, him thou also might’st have seen,

Who by the servants’ servant was transferr’d

From Arno’s seat to Bacchiglione, where

His ill-strain’d nerves he left. I more would add,

But must from farther speech and onward way

Alike desist, for yonder I behold

A mist new-risen on the sandy plain.

A company, with whom I may not sort,

Approaches. I commend my TREASURE to thee,

Wherein I yet survive; my sole request.”

This said he turn’d, and seem’d as one of those,

Who o’er Verona’s champain try their speed

For the green mantle, and of them he seem’d,

Not he who loses but who gains the prize.

CANTO XVI

Now came I where the water’s din was heard,

As down it fell into the other round,

Resounding like the hum of swarming bees:

When forth together issu’d from a troop,

That pass’d beneath the fierce tormenting storm,

Three spirits, running swift. They towards us came,

And each one cried aloud, “Oh do thou stay!

Whom by the fashion of thy garb we deem

To be some inmate of our evil land.”

Ah me! what wounds I mark’d upon their limbs,

Recent and old, inflicted by the flames!

E’en the remembrance of them grieves me yet.

Attentive to their cry my teacher paus’d,

And turn’d to me his visage, and then spake;

“Wait now! our courtesy these merit well:

And were ’t not for the nature of the place,

Whence glide the fiery darts, I should have said,

That haste had better suited thee than them.”

They, when we stopp’d, resum’d their ancient wail,

And soon as they had reach’d us, all the three

Whirl’d round together in one restless wheel.

As naked champions, smear’d with slippery oil,

Are wont intent to watch their place of hold

And vantage, ere in closer strife they meet;

Thus each one, as he wheel’d, his countenance

At me directed, so that opposite

The neck mov’d ever to the twinkling feet.

“If misery of this drear wilderness,”

Thus one began, “added to our sad cheer

And destitute, do call forth scorn on us

And our entreaties, let our great renown

Incline thee to inform us who thou art,

That dost imprint with living feet unharm’d

The soil of Hell. He, in whose track thou see’st

My steps pursuing, naked though he be

And reft of all, was of more high estate

Than thou believest; grandchild of the chaste

Gualdrada, him they Guidoguerra call’d,

Who in his lifetime many a noble act

Achiev’d, both by his wisdom and his sword.

The other, next to me that beats the sand,

Is Aldobrandi, name deserving well,

In the upper world, of honour; and myself

Who in this torment do partake with them,

Am Rusticucci, whom, past doubt, my wife

Of savage temper, more than aught beside

Hath to this evil brought." If from the fire

I had been shelter'd, down amidst them straight

I then had cast me, nor my guide, I deem,

Would have restrain'd my going; but that fear

Of the dire burning vanquish'd the desire,

Which made me eager of their wish'd embrace.

I then began: "Not scorn, but grief much more,

Such as long time alone can cure, your doom

Fix'd deep within me, soon as this my lord

Spake words, whose tenour taught me to expect

That such a race, as ye are, was at hand.

I am a countryman of yours, who still

Affectionate have utter’d, and have heard

Your deeds and names renown’d. Leaving the gall

For the sweet fruit I go, that a sure guide

Hath promis’d to me. But behooves, that far

As to the centre first I downward tend.”

“So may long space thy spirit guide thy limbs,”

He answer straight return’d; “and so thy fame

Shine bright, when thou art gone; as thou shalt tell,

If courtesy and valour, as they wont,

Dwell in our city, or have vanish’d clean?

For one amidst us late condemn’d to wail,

Borsiere, yonder walking with his peers,

Grieves us no little by the news he brings.”

“An upstart multitude and sudden gains,

Pride and excess, O Florence! have in thee

Engender’d, so that now in tears thou mourn’st!”

Thus cried I with my face uprais’d, and they

All three, who for an answer took my words,

Look’d at each other, as men look when truth

Comes to their ear. “If thou at other times,”

They all at once rejoin’d, “so easily

Satisfy those, who question, happy thou,

Gifted with words, so apt to speak thy thought!

Wherefore if thou escape this darksome clime,

Returning to behold the radiant stars,

When thou with pleasure shalt retrace the past,

See that of us thou speak among mankind.”

This said, they broke the circle, and so swift

Fled, that as pinions seem’d their nimble feet.

Not in so short a time might one have said

“Amen,” as they had vanish’d. Straight my guide

Pursu’d his track. I follow’d; and small space

Had we pass’d onward, when the water’s sound

Was now so near at hand, that we had scarce

Heard one another’s speech for the loud din.

E’en as the river, that holds on its course

Unmingled, from the mount of Vesulo,

On the left side of Apennine, toward

The east, which Acquacheta higher up

They call, ere it descend into the vale,

At Forli by that name no longer known,

Rebellows o’er Saint Benedict, roll’d on

From the Alpine summit down a precipice,

Where space enough to lodge a thousand spreads;

Thus downward from a craggy steep we found,

That this dark wave resounded, roaring loud,

So that the ear its clamour soon had stunn’d.

I had a cord that brac’d my girdle round,

Wherewith I erst had thought fast bound to take

The painted leopard. This when I had all

Unloosen’d from me (so my master bade)

I gather’d up, and stretch’d it forth to him.

Then to the right he turn’d, and from the brink

Standing few paces distant, cast it down

Into the deep abyss. “And somewhat strange,”

Thus to myself I spake, “signal so strange

Betokens, which my guide with earnest eye

Thus follows.” Ah! what caution must men use

With those who look not at the deed alone,

But spy into the thoughts with subtle skill!

“Quickly shall come,” he said, “what I expect,

Thine eye discover quickly, that whereof

Thy thought is dreaming.” Ever to that truth,

Which but the semblance of a falsehood wears,

A man, if possible, should bar his lip;

Since, although blameless, he incurs reproach.

But silence here were vain; and by these notes

Which now I sing, reader! I swear to thee,

So may they favour find to latest times!

That through the gross and murky air I spied

A shape come swimming up, that might have quell’d

The stoutest heart with wonder, in such guise

As one returns, who hath been down to loose

An anchor grappled fast against some rock,

Or to aught else that in the salt wave lies,

Who upward springing close draws in his feet.

CANTO XVII

“Lo! the fell monster with the deadly sting!

Who passes mountains, breaks through fenced walls

And firm embattled spears, and with his filth

Taints all the world!” Thus me my guide address’d,

And beckon’d him, that he should come to shore,

Near to the stony causeway’s utmost edge.
Forthwith that image vile of fraud appear’d,

His head and upper part expos’d on land,

But laid not on the shore his bestial train.

His face the semblance of a just man’s wore,

So kind and gracious was its outward cheer;

The rest was serpent all: two shaggy claws

Reach’d to the armpits, and the back and breast,

And either side, were painted o’er with nodes

And orbits. Colours variegated more

Nor Turks nor Tartars e’er on cloth of state

With interchangeable embroidery wove,

Nor spread Arachne o’er her curious loom.

As ofttimes a light skiff, moor’d to the shore,

Stands part in water, part upon the land;

Or, as where dwells the greedy German boor,

The beaver settles watching for his prey;

So on the rim, that fenc’d the sand with rock,

Sat perch’d the fiend of evil. In the void

Glancing, his tail upturn’d its venomous fork,

With sting like scorpion’s arm’d. Then thus my guide:

“Now need our way must turn few steps apart,

Far as to that ill beast, who couches there.”

Thereat toward the right our downward course

We shap’d, and, better to escape the flame

And burning marle, ten paces on the verge

Proceeded. Soon as we to him arrive,

A little further on mine eye beholds

A tribe of spirits, seated on the sand

Near the wide chasm. Forthwith my master spake:

“That to the full thy knowledge may extend

Of all this round contains, go now, and mark

The mien these wear: but hold not long discourse.

Till thou returnest, I with him meantime

Will parley, that to us he may vouchsafe

The aid of his strong shoulders.” Thus alone

Yet forward on the extremity I pac’d

Of that seventh circle, where the mournful tribe

Were seated. At the eyes forth gush’d their pangs.

Against the vapours and the torrid soil

Alternately their shifting hands they plied.

Thus use the dogs in summer still to ply

Their jaws and feet by turns, when bitten sore

By gnats, or flies, or gadflies swarming round.

Noting the visages of some, who lay

Beneath the pelting of that dolorous fire,

One of them all I knew not; but perceiv’d,

That pendent from his neck each bore a pouch

With colours and with emblems various mark’d,

On which it seem’d as if their eye did feed.

And when amongst them looking round I came,

A yellow purse I saw with azure wrought,

That wore a lion’s countenance and port.

Then still my sight pursuing its career,

Another I beheld, than blood more red.

A goose display of whiter wing than curd.

And one, who bore a fat and azure swine

Pictur’d on his white scrip, addressed me thus:

“What dost thou in this deep? Go now and know,

Since yet thou livest, that my neighbour here

Vitaliano on my left shall sit.

A Paduan with these Florentines am I.

Ofttimes they thunder in mine ears, exclaiming

‘O haste that noble knight! he who the pouch

With the three beaks will bring!’” This said, he writh’d

The mouth, and loll’d the tongue out, like an ox

That licks his nostrils. I, lest longer stay

He ill might brook, who bade me stay not long,

Backward my steps from those sad spirits turn’d.

My guide already seated on the haunch

Of the fierce animal I found; and thus

He me encourag’d. “Be thou stout; be bold.

Down such a steep flight must we now descend!

Mount thou before: for that no power the tail

May have to harm thee, I will be i’ th’ midst.”

As one, who hath an ague fit so near,

His nails already are turn’d blue, and he

Quivers all o’er, if he but eye the shade;

Such was my cheer at hearing of his words.

But shame soon interpos’d her threat, who makes

The servant bold in presence of his lord.

I settled me upon those shoulders huge,

And would have said, but that the words to aid

My purpose came not, “Look thou clasp me firm!”

But he whose succour then not first I prov’d,

Soon as I mounted, in his arms aloft,

Embracing, held me up, and thus he spake:

“Geryon! now move thee! be thy wheeling gyres

Of ample circuit, easy thy descent.

Think on th’ unusual burden thou sustain’st.”

As a small vessel, back’ning out from land,

Her station quits; so thence the monster loos’d,

And when he felt himself at large, turn’d round

There where the breast had been, his forked tail.

Thus, like an eel, outstretch’d at length he steer’d,

Gath’ring the air up with retractile claws.

Not greater was the dread when Phaeton

The reins let drop at random, whence high heaven,

Whereof signs yet appear, was wrapt in flames;

Nor when ill-fated Icarus perceiv’d,

By liquefaction of the scalded wax,

The trusted pennons loosen’d from his loins,

His sire exclaiming loud, “Ill way thou keep’st!”

Than was my dread, when round me on each part

The air I view’d, and other object none

Save the fell beast. He slowly sailing, wheels

His downward motion, unobserv’d of me,

But that the wind, arising to my face,

Breathes on me from below. Now on our right

I heard the cataract beneath us leap

With hideous crash; whence bending down to’ explore,

New terror I conceiv’d at the steep plunge:
For flames I saw, and wailings smote mine ear:

So that all trembling close I crouch’d my limbs,

And then distinguish’d, unperceiv’d before,

By the dread torments that on every side

Drew nearer, how our downward course we wound.

As falcon, that hath long been on the wing,

But lure nor bird hath seen, while in despair

The falconer cries, “Ah me! thou stoop’st to earth!”

Wearied descends, and swiftly down the sky

In many an orbit wheels, then lighting sits

At distance from his lord in angry mood;

So Geryon lighting places us on foot

Low down at base of the deep-furrow’d rock,

And, of his burden there discharg’d, forthwith

Sprang forward, like an arrow from the string.

CANTO XVIII

There is a place within the depths of hell

Call’d Malebolge, all of rock dark-stain’d

With hue ferruginous, e’en as the steep

That round it circling winds. Right in the midst

Of that abominable region, yawns

A spacious gulf profound, whereof the frame

Due time shall tell. The circle, that remains,

Throughout its round, between the gulf and base

Of the high craggy banks, successive forms

Ten trenches, in its hollow bottom sunk.

As where to guard the walls, full many a foss

Begirds some stately castle, sure defence

Affording to the space within, so here

Were model'd these; and as like fortresses

E'en from their threshold to the brink without,

Are flank'd with bridges; from the rock's low base

Thus flinty paths advanc'd, that 'cross the moles

And dikes, struck onward far as to the gulf,

That in one bound collected cuts them off.

Such was the place, wherein we found ourselves

From Geryon's back dislodg'd. The bard to left

Held on his way, and I behind him mov'd.

On our right hand new misery I saw,

New pains, new executioners of wrath,

That swarming peopled the first chasm. Below

Were naked sinners. Hitherward they came,

Meeting our faces from the middle point,

With us beyond but with a larger stride.

E’en thus the Romans, when the year returns

Of Jubilee, with better speed to rid

The thronging multitudes, their means devise

For such as pass the bridge; that on one side

All front toward the castle, and approach

Saint Peter’s fane, on th’ other towards the mount.

Each divers way along the grisly rock,

Horn’d demons I beheld, with lashes huge,

That on their back unmercifully smote.

Ah! how they made them bound at the first stripe!
None for the second waited nor the third.

Meantime as on I pass’d, one met my sight

Whom soon as view’d; “Of him,” cried I, “not yet

Mine eye hath had his fill.” With fixed gaze

I therefore scann’d him. Straight the teacher kind

Paus’d with me, and consented I should walk

Backward a space, and the tormented spirit,

Who thought to hide him, bent his visage down.

But it avail’d him nought; for I exclaim’d:

“Thou who dost cast thy eye upon the ground,

Unless thy features do belie thee much,

Venedico art thou. But what brings thee

Into this bitter seas’ning?” He replied:

“Unwillingly I answer to thy words.

But thy clear speech, that to my mind recalls

The world I once inhabited, constrains me.

Know then ’twas I who led fair Ghisola

To do the Marquis’ will, however fame

The shameful tale have bruited. Nor alone

Bologna hither sendeth me to mourn

Rather with us the place is so o’erthrong’d

That not so many tongues this day are taught,

Betwixt the Reno and Savena’s stream,

To answer SIPA in their country’s phrase.

And if of that securer proof thou need,

Remember but our craving thirst for gold.”

Him speaking thus, a demon with his thong

Struck, and exclaim’d, “Away! corrupter! here

Women are none for sale.” Forthwith I join’d

My escort, and few paces thence we came

To where a rock forth issued from the bank.

That easily ascended, to the right

Upon its splinter turning, we depart

From those eternal barriers. When arriv’d,

Where underneath the gaping arch lets pass

The scourged souls: “Pause here,” the teacher said,

“And let these others miserable, now

Strike on thy ken, faces not yet beheld,

For that together they with us have walk’d.”

From the old bridge we ey’d the pack, who came

From th’ other side towards us, like the rest,

Excoriate from the lash. My gentle guide,

By me unquestion’d, thus his speech resum’d:

“Behold that lofty shade, who this way tends,

And seems too woe-begone to drop a tear.

How yet the regal aspect he retains!

Jason is he, whose skill and prowess won

The ram from Colchos. To the Lemnian isle

His passage thither led him, when those bold

And pitiless women had slain all their males.

There he with tokens and fair witching words

Hypsipyle beguil’d, a virgin young,

Who first had all the rest herself beguil’d.

Impregnated he left her there forlorn.

Such is the guilt condemns him to this pain.

Here too Medea’s inj’ries are avenged.

All bear him company, who like deceit

To his have practis’d. And thus much to know

Of the first vale suffice thee, and of those

Whom its keen torments urge.” Now had we come

Where, crossing the next pier, the straighten’d path

Bestrides its shoulders to another arch.

Hence in the second chasm we heard the ghosts,

Who jibber in low melancholy sounds,

With wide-stretch’d nostrils snort, and on themselves

Smite with their palms. Upon the banks a scurf

From the foul steam condens’d, encrusting hung,

That held sharp combat with the sight and smell.

So hollow is the depth, that from no part,

Save on the summit of the rocky span,

Could I distinguish aught. Thus far we came;

And thence I saw, within the foss below,

A crowd immers’d in ordure, that appear’d

Draff of the human body. There beneath

Searching with eye inquisitive, I mark’d

One with his head so grim’d, ’twere hard to deem,

If he were clerk or layman. Loud he cried:

“Why greedily thus bendest more on me,

Than on these other filthy ones, thy ken?”
“Because if true my mem’ry,” I replied,

“I heretofore have seen thee with dry locks,

And thou Alessio art of Lucca sprung.

Therefore than all the rest I scan thee more.”

Then beating on his brain these words he spake:

“Me thus low down my flatteries have sunk,

Wherewith I ne’er enough could glut my tongue.”

My leader thus: “A little further stretch

Thy face, that thou the visage well mayst note

Of that besotted, sluttish courtezan,

Who there doth rend her with defiled nails,

Now crouching down, now risen on her feet.
“Thais is this, the harlot, whose false lip

Answer’d her doting paramour that ask’d,

‘Thankest me much!’—‘Say rather wondrously,’

And seeing this here satiate be our view.”

CANTO XIX

Woe to thee, Simon Magus! woe to you,

His wretched followers! who the things of God,

Which should be wedded unto goodness, them,

Rapacious as ye are, do prostitute

For gold and silver in adultery!

Now must the trumpet sound for you, since yours

Is the third chasm. Upon the following vault

We now had mounted, where the rock impends

Directly o’er the centre of the foss.

Wisdom Supreme! how wonderful the art,

Which thou dost manifest in heaven, in earth,

And in the evil world, how just a meed

Allotting by thy virtue unto all!

I saw the livid stone, throughout the sides

And in its bottom full of apertures,

All equal in their width, and circular each,

Nor ample less nor larger they appear’d

Than in Saint John’s fair dome of me belov’d

Those fram’d to hold the pure baptismal streams,

One of the which I brake, some few years past,

To save a whelming infant; and be this

A seal to undeceive whoever doubts

The motive of my deed. From out the mouth

Of every one, emerg’d a sinner’s feet

And of the legs high upward as the calf

The rest beneath was hid. On either foot

The soles were burning, whence the flexile joints

Glanc’d with such violent motion, as had snapt

Asunder cords or twisted withs. As flame,

Feeding on unctuous matter, glides along

The surface, scarcely touching where it moves;

So here, from heel to point, glided the flames.

“Master! say who is he, than all the rest

Glancing in fiercer agony, on whom

A ruddier flame doth prey?” I thus inquir’d.

“If thou be willing,” he replied, “that I

Carry thee down, where least the slope bank falls,

He of himself shall tell thee and his wrongs.”

I then: “As pleases thee to me is best.

Thou art my lord; and know’st that ne’er I quit

Thy will: what silence hides that knowest thou.”

Thereat on the fourth pier we came, we turn’d,

And on our left descended to the depth,

A narrow strait and perforated close.

Nor from his side my leader set me down,

Till to his orifice he brought, whose limb

Quiv’ring express’d his pang. “Whoe’er thou art,

Sad spirit! thus revers’d, and as a stake

Driv’n in the soil!” I in these words began,

“If thou be able, utter forth thy voice.”
There stood I like the friar, that doth shrive

A wretch for murder doom’d, who e’en when fix’d,

Calleth him back, whence death awhile delays.

He shouted: “Ha! already standest there?

Already standest there, O Boniface!

By many a year the writing play’d me false.

So early dost thou surfeit with the wealth,

For which thou fearedst not in guile to take

The lovely lady, and then mangle her?”

I felt as those who, piercing not the drift

Of answer made them, stand as if expos’d

In mockery, nor know what to reply,

When Virgil thus admonish’d: “Tell him quick,

I am not he, not he, whom thou believ’st.”

And I, as was enjoin’d me, straight replied.

That heard, the spirit all did wrench his feet,

And sighing next in woeful accent spake:

“What then of me requirest?” “If to know

So much imports thee, who I am, that thou

Hast therefore down the bank descended, learn

That in the mighty mantle I was rob’d,

And of a she-bear was indeed the son,

So eager to advance my whelps, that there

My having in my purse above I stow’d,

And here myself. Under my head are dragg’d

The rest, my predecessors in the guilt

Of simony. Stretch’d at their length they lie

Along an opening in the rock. ’Midst them

I also low shall fall, soon as he comes,

For whom I took thee, when so hastily

I question’d. But already longer time

Hath pass’d, since my souls kindled, and I thus

Upturn’d have stood, than is his doom to stand

Planted with fiery feet. For after him,

One yet of deeds more ugly shall arrive,

From forth the west, a shepherd without law,

Fated to cover both his form and mine.

He a new Jason shall be call’d, of whom

In Maccabees we read; and favour such

As to that priest his king indulgent show’d,

Shall be of France’s monarch shown to him.”

I know not if I here too far presum’d,

But in this strain I answer’d: “Tell me now,

What treasures from St. Peter at the first

Our Lord demanded, when he put the keys

Into his charge? Surely he ask’d no more

But, Follow me! Nor Peter nor the rest

Or gold or silver of Matthias took,

When lots were cast upon the forfeit place

Of the condemned soul. Abide thou then;

Thy punishment of right is merited:

And look thou well to that ill-gotten coin,

Which against Charles thy hardihood inspir’d.

If reverence of the keys restrain’d me not,

Which thou in happier time didst hold, I yet

Severer speech might use. Your avarice

O’ercasts the world with mourning, under foot

Treading the good, and raising bad men up.

Of shepherds, like to you, th’ Evangelist

Was ware, when her, who sits upon the waves,

With kings in filthy whoredom he beheld,

She who with seven heads tower’d at her birth,

And from ten horns her proof of glory drew,

Long as her spouse in virtue took delight.

Of gold and silver ye have made your god,

Diff’ring wherein from the idolater,

But he that worships one, a hundred ye?

Ah, Constantine! to how much ill gave birth,

Not thy conversion, but that plenteous dower,

Which the first wealthy Father gain’d from thee!”

Meanwhile, as thus I sung, he, whether wrath

Or conscience smote him, violent upsprang

Spinning on either sole. I do believe

My teacher well was pleas’d, with so compos’d

A lip, he listen’d ever to the sound

Of the true words I utter’d. In both arms

He caught, and to his bosom lifting me

Upward retrac’d the way of his descent.

Nor weary of his weight he press’d me close,

Till to the summit of the rock we came,

Our passage from the fourth to the fifth pier.

His cherish’d burden there gently he plac’d

Upon the rugged rock and steep, a path

Not easy for the clamb’ring goat to mount.

Thence to my view another vale appear’d

CANTO XX

And now the verse proceeds to torments new,

Fit argument of this the twentieth strain

Of the first song, whose awful theme records

The spirits whelm’d in woe. Earnest I look’d

Into the depth, that open’d to my view,

Moisten’d with tears of anguish, and beheld

A tribe, that came along the hollow vale,

In silence weeping: such their step as walk

Quires chanting solemn litanies on earth.

As on them more direct mine eye descends,

Each wondrously seem’d to be revers’d

At the neck-bone, so that the countenance

Was from the reins averted: and because

None might before him look, they were compell’d

To’ advance with backward gait. Thus one perhaps

Hath been by force of palsy clean transpos’d,

But I ne’er saw it nor believe it so.

Now, reader! think within thyself, so God

Fruit of thy reading give thee! how I long

Could keep my visage dry, when I beheld

Near me our form distorted in such guise,

That on the hinder parts fall’n from the face

The tears down-streaming roll’d. Against a rock

I leant and wept, so that my guide exclaim’d:

“What, and art thou too witless as the rest?

Here pity most doth show herself alive,

When she is dead. What guilt exceedeth his,

Who with Heaven’s judgment in his passion strives?

Raise up thy head, raise up, and see the man,

Before whose eyes earth gap’d in Thebes, when all

Cried out, ‘Amphiaraus, whither rushest?

‘Why leavest thou the war?’ He not the less

Fell ruining far as to Minos down,

Whose grapple none eludes. Lo! how he makes

The breast his shoulders, and who once too far

Before him wish’d to see, now backward looks,

And treads reverse his path. Tiresias note,

Who semblance chang’d, when woman he became

Of male, through every limb transform’d, and then

Once more behov’d him with his rod to strike

The two entwining serpents, ere the plumes,

That mark’d the better sex, might shoot again.

“Aruns, with more his belly facing, comes.

On Luni’s mountains ’midst the marbles white,

Where delves Carrara’s hind, who wons beneath,

A cavern was his dwelling, whence the stars

And main-sea wide in boundless view he held.

“The next, whose loosen’d tresses overspread

Her bosom, which thou seest not (for each hair

On that side grows) was Manto, she who search’d

Through many regions, and at length her seat

Fix’d in my native land, whence a short space

My words detain thy audience. When her sire

From life departed, and in servitude

The city dedicate to Bacchus mourn’d,

Long time she went a wand’rer through the world.

Aloft in Italy’s delightful land

A lake there lies, at foot of that proud Alp,

That o’er the Tyrol locks Germania in,

Its name Benacus, which a thousand rills,

Methinks, and more, water between the vale

Camonica and Garda and the height

Of Apennine remote. There is a spot

At midway of that lake, where he who bears

Of Trento’s flock the past’ral staff, with him

Of Brescia, and the Veronese, might each

Passing that way his benediction give.

A garrison of goodly site and strong

Peschiera stands, to awe with front oppos’d

The Bergamese and Brescian, whence the shore

More slope each way descends. There, whatsoev’er

Benacus’ bosom holds not, tumbling o’er

Down falls, and winds a river flood beneath

Through the green pastures. Soon as in his course

The steam makes head, Benacus then no more

They call the name, but Mincius, till at last

Reaching Governo into Po he falls.

Not far his course hath run, when a wide flat

It finds, which overstretchmg as a marsh

It covers, pestilent in summer oft.

Hence journeying, the savage maiden saw

’Midst of the fen a territory waste

And naked of inhabitants. To shun

All human converse, here she with her slaves

Plying her arts remain’d, and liv’d, and left

Her body tenantless. Thenceforth the tribes,

Who round were scatter’d, gath’ring to that place

Assembled; for its strength was great, enclos’d

On all parts by the fen. On those dead bones

They rear’d themselves a city, for her sake,

Calling it Mantua, who first chose the spot,

Nor ask’d another omen for the name,

Wherein more numerous the people dwelt,

Ere Casalodi’s madness by deceit

Was wrong’d of Pinamonte. If thou hear

Henceforth another origin assign’d

Of that my country, I forewarn thee now,

That falsehood none beguile thee of the truth.”

I answer’d: “Teacher, I conclude thy words

So certain, that all else shall be to me

As embers lacking life. But now of these,

Who here proceed, instruct me, if thou see

Any that merit more especial note.

For thereon is my mind alone intent.”

He straight replied: “That spirit, from whose cheek

The beard sweeps o’er his shoulders brown, what time

Graecia was emptied of her males, that scarce

The cradles were supplied, the seer was he

In Aulis, who with Calchas gave the sign

When first to cut the cable. Him they nam’d

Eurypilus: so sings my tragic strain,

In which majestic measure well thou know’st,

Who know’st it all. That other, round the loins

So slender of his shape, was Michael Scot,

Practis’d in ev’ry slight of magic wile.

“Guido Bonatti see: Asdente mark,

Who now were willing, he had tended still

The thread and cordwain; and too late repents.

“See next the wretches, who the needle left,

The shuttle and the spindle, and became

Diviners: baneful witcheries they wrought

With images and herbs. But onward now:

For now doth Cain with fork of thorns confine

On either hemisphere, touching the wave

Beneath the towers of Seville. Yesternight

The moon was round. Thou mayst remember well:

For she good service did thee in the gloom

Of the deep wood.” This said, both onward mov’d.

CANTO XXI

Thus we from bridge to bridge, with other talk,

The which my drama cares not to rehearse,

Pass’d on; and to the summit reaching, stood

To view another gap, within the round

Of Malebolge, other bootless pangs.

Marvelous darkness shadow’d o’er the place.

In the Venetians’ arsenal as boils

Through wintry months tenacious pitch, to smear

Their unsound vessels; for th’ inclement time

Sea-faring men restrains, and in that while

His bark one builds anew, another stops

The ribs of his, that hath made many a voyage;

One hammers at the prow, one at the poop;

This shapeth oars, that other cables twirls,

The mizen one repairs and main-sail rent

So not by force of fire but art divine

Boil’d here a glutinous thick mass, that round

Lim’d all the shore beneath. I that beheld,

But therein nought distinguish’d, save the surge,

Rais’d by the boiling, in one mighty swell

Heave, and by turns subsiding and fall. While there

I fix’d my ken below, “Mark! mark!” my guide

Exclaiming, drew me towards him from the place,

Wherein I stood. I turn’d myself as one,

Impatient to behold that which beheld

He needs must shun, whom sudden fear unmans,

That he his flight delays not for the view.

Behind me I discern’d a devil black,

That running, up advanc’d along the rock.

Ah! what fierce cruelty his look bespake!

In act how bitter did he seem, with wings

Buoyant outstretch’d and feet of nimblest tread!

His shoulder proudly eminent and sharp

Was with a sinner charg’d; by either haunch

He held him, the foot’s sinew griping fast.

“Ye of our bridge!” he cried, “keen-talon’d fiends!

Lo! one of Santa Zita’s elders! Him

Whelm ye beneath, while I return for more.

That land hath store of such. All men are there,

Except Bonturo, barterers: of ‘no’

For lucre there an ‘aye’ is quickly made.”

Him dashing down, o’er the rough rock he turn’d,

Nor ever after thief a mastiff loos’d

Sped with like eager haste. That other sank

And forthwith writhing to the surface rose.

But those dark demons, shrouded by the bridge,

Cried “Here the hallow’d visage saves not: here

Is other swimming than in Serchio’s wave.

Wherefore if thou desire we rend thee not,

Take heed thou mount not o’er the pitch.” This said,

They grappled him with more than hundred hooks,

And shouted: “Cover’d thou must sport thee here;

So, if thou canst, in secret mayst thou filch.”
E’en thus the cook bestirs him, with his grooms,

To thrust the flesh into the caldron down

With flesh-hooks, that it float not on the top.

Me then my guide bespake: “Lest they descry,

That thou art here, behind a craggy rock

Bend low and screen thee; and whate’er of force

Be offer’d me, or insult, fear thou not:

For I am well advis’d, who have been erst

In the like fray.” Beyond the bridge’s head

Therewith he pass’d, and reaching the sixth pier,

Behov’d him then a forehead terror-proof.

With storm and fury, as when dogs rush forth

Upon the poor man’s back, who suddenly

From whence he standeth makes his suit; so rush’d

Those from beneath the arch, and against him

Their weapons all they pointed. He aloud:

“Be none of you outrageous: ere your time

Dare seize me, come forth from amongst you one,
“Who having heard my words, decide he then

If he shall tear these limbs.” They shouted loud,

“Go, Malacoda!” Whereat one advanc’d,

The others standing firm, and as he came,

“What may this turn avail him?” he exclaim’d.

“Believ’st thou, Malacoda! I had come

Thus far from all your skirmishing secure,”

My teacher answered, “without will divine

And destiny propitious? Pass we then

For so Heaven’s pleasure is, that I should lead

Another through this savage wilderness.”

Forthwith so fell his pride, that he let drop

The instrument of torture at his feet,

And to the rest exclaim’d: “We have no power

To strike him.” Then to me my guide: “O thou!

Who on the bridge among the crags dost sit

Low crouching, safely now to me return.”

I rose, and towards him moved with speed: the fiends

Meantime all forward drew: me terror seiz’d

Lest they should break the compact they had made.

Thus issuing from Caprona, once I saw

Th’ infantry dreading, lest his covenant

The foe should break; so close he hemm’d them round.

I to my leader’s side adher’d, mine eyes

With fixt and motionless observance bent

On their unkindly visage. They their hooks

Protruding, one the other thus bespake:

“Wilt thou I touch him on the hip?” To whom

Was answer’d: “Even so; nor miss thy aim.”

But he, who was in conf’rence with my guide,

Turn’d rapid round, and thus the demon spake:

“Stay, stay thee, Scarmiglione!” Then to us

He added: “Further footing to your step

This rock affords not, shiver’d to the base

Of the sixth arch. But would you still proceed,

Up by this cavern go: not distant far,

Another rock will yield you passage safe.

Yesterday, later by five hours than now,

Twelve hundred threescore years and six had fill’d

The circuit of their course, since here the way

Was broken. Thitherward I straight dispatch

Certain of these my scouts, who shall espy

If any on the surface bask. With them

Go ye: for ye shall find them nothing fell.

Come Alichino forth,” with that he cried,

“And Calcabrina, and Cagnazzo thou!

The troop of ten let Barbariccia lead.

With Libicocco Draghinazzo haste,

Fang’d Ciriatto, Grafflacane fierce,

And Farfarello, and mad Rubicant.

Search ye around the bubbling tar. For these,

In safety lead them, where the other crag

Uninterrupted traverses the dens.”

I then: “O master! what a sight is there!

Ah! without escort, journey we alone,

Which, if thou know the way, I covet not.

Unless thy prudence fail thee, dost not mark

How they do gnarl upon us, and their scowl

Threatens us present tortures?” He replied:

“I charge thee fear not: let them, as they will,

Gnarl on: ’t is but in token of their spite

Against the souls, who mourn in torment steep’d.”

To leftward o’er the pier they turn’d; but each

Had first between his teeth prest close the tongue,

Toward their leader for a signal looking,

Which he with sound obscene triumphant gave.

CANTO XXII

It hath been heretofore my chance to see

Horsemen with martial order shifting camp,

To onset sallying, or in muster rang’d,

Or in retreat sometimes outstretch’d for flight;

Light-armed squadrons and fleet foragers

Scouring thy plains, Arezzo! have I seen,

And clashing tournaments, and tilting jousts,

Now with the sound of trumpets, now of bells,

Tabors, or signals made from castled heights,

And with inventions multiform, our own,

Or introduc’d from foreign land; but ne’er

To such a strange recorder I beheld,

In evolution moving, horse nor foot,

Nor ship, that tack’d by sign from land or star.

With the ten demons on our way we went;

Ah fearful company! but in the church

With saints, with gluttons at the tavern’s mess.

Still earnest on the pitch I gaz’d, to mark

All things whate’er the chasm contain’d, and those

Who burn’d within. As dolphins, that, in sign

To mariners, heave high their arched backs,

That thence forewarn’d they may advise to save

Their threaten’d vessels; so, at intervals,

To ease the pain his back some sinner show’d,

Then hid more nimbly than the lightning glance.

E’en as the frogs, that of a wat’ry moat

Stand at the brink, with the jaws only out,

Their feet and of the trunk all else concealed,

Thus on each part the sinners stood, but soon

As Barbariccia was at hand, so they

Drew back under the wave. I saw, and yet

My heart doth stagger, one, that waited thus,

As it befalls that oft one frog remains,

While the next springs away: and Graffiacan,

Who of the fiends was nearest, grappling seiz’d

His clotted locks, and dragg’d him sprawling up,

That he appear’d to me an otter. Each

Already by their names I knew, so well

When they were chosen, I observ’d, and mark’d

How one the other call’d. “O Rubicant!

See that his hide thou with thy talons flay,”

Shouted together all the cursed crew.

Then I: “Inform thee, master! if thou may,

What wretched soul is this, on whom their hand

His foes have laid.” My leader to his side

Approach’d, and whence he came inquir’d, to whom

Was answer’d thus: “Born in Navarre’s domain

My mother plac’d me in a lord’s retinue,

For she had borne me to a losel vile,

A spendthrift of his substance and himself.

The good king Thibault after that I serv’d,

To peculating here my thoughts were turn’d,

Whereof I give account in this dire heat.”

Straight Ciriatto, from whose mouth a tusk

Issued on either side, as from a boar,

Ript him with one of these. ’Twixt evil claws

The mouse had fall’n: but Barbariccia cried,

Seizing him with both arms: “Stand thou apart,

While I do fix him on my prong transpierc’d.”

Then added, turning to my guide his face,

“Inquire of him, if more thou wish to learn,

Ere he again be rent.” My leader thus:

“Then tell us of the partners in thy guilt;

Knowest thou any sprung of Latian land

Under the tar?”—“I parted,” he replied,

“But now from one, who sojourn’d not far thence;

So were I under shelter now with him!

Nor hook nor talon then should scare me more.”—.

“Too long we suffer,” Libicocco cried,

Then, darting forth a prong, seiz’d on his arm,

And mangled bore away the sinewy part.

Him Draghinazzo by his thighs beneath

Would next have caught, whence angrily their chief,

Turning on all sides round, with threat’ning brow

Restrain’d them. When their strife a little ceas’d,

Of him, who yet was gazing on his wound,

My teacher thus without delay inquir’d:

“Who was the spirit, from whom by evil hap

Parting, as thou has told, thou cam’st to shore?”—

“It was the friar Gomita,” he rejoin’d,

“He of Gallura, vessel of all guile,

Who had his master’s enemies in hand,

And us’d them so that they commend him well.

Money he took, and them at large dismiss’d.

So he reports: and in each other charge

Committed to his keeping, play’d the part

Of barterer to the height: with him doth herd

The chief of Logodoro, Michel Zanche.

Sardinia is a theme, whereof their tongue

Is never weary. Out! alas! behold

That other, how he grins! More would I say,

But tremble lest he mean to maul me sore.”

Their captain then to Farfarello turning,

Who roll’d his moony eyes in act to strike,

Rebuk’d him thus: “Off! cursed bird! Avaunt!”—

“If ye desire to see or hear,” he thus

Quaking with dread resum’d, “or Tuscan spirits

Or Lombard, I will cause them to appear.

Meantime let these ill talons bate their fury,

So that no vengeance they may fear from them,

And I, remaining in this self-same place,

Will for myself but one, make sev’n appear,

When my shrill whistle shall be heard; for so

Our custom is to call each other up.”

Cagnazzo at that word deriding grinn’d,

Then wagg’d the head and spake: “Hear his device,

Mischievous as he is, to plunge him down.”

Whereto he thus, who fail’d not in rich store

Of nice-wove toils; “Mischief forsooth extreme,

Meant only to procure myself more woe!”

No longer Alichino then refrain’d,

But thus, the rest gainsaying, him bespake:

“If thou do cast thee down, I not on foot

Will chase thee, but above the pitch will beat

My plumes. Quit we the vantage ground, and let

The bank be as a shield, that we may see

If singly thou prevail against us all.”

Now, reader, of new sport expect to hear!

They each one turn’d his eyes to the other shore,

He first, who was the hardest to persuade.

The spirit of Navarre chose well his time,

Planted his feet on land, and at one leap

Escaping disappointed their resolve.

Them quick resentment stung, but him the most,

Who was the cause of failure; in pursuit

He therefore sped, exclaiming: “Thou art caught.”
But little it avail’d: terror outstripp’d

His following flight: the other plung’d beneath,

And he with upward pinion rais’d his breast:

E’en thus the water-fowl, when she perceives

The falcon near, dives instant down, while he

Enrag’d and spent retires. That mockery

In Calcabrina fury stirr’d, who flew

After him, with desire of strife inflam’d;

And, for the barterer had ’scap’d, so turn’d

His talons on his comrade. O’er the dyke

In grapple close they join’d; but the other prov’d

A goshawk able to rend well his foe;
And in the boiling lake both fell. The heat

Was umpire soon between them, but in vain

To lift themselves they strove, so fast were glued

Their pennons. Barbariccia, as the rest,

That chance lamenting, four in flight dispatch’d

From the other coast, with all their weapons arm’d.

They, to their post on each side speedily

Descending, stretch’d their hooks toward the fiends,

Who flounder’d, inly burning from their scars:

And we departing left them to that broil.

CANTO XXIII

In silence and in solitude we went,

One first, the other following his steps,

As minor friars journeying on their road.

The present fray had turn’d my thoughts to muse

Upon old Aesop’s fable, where he told

What fate unto the mouse and frog befell.

For language hath not sounds more like in sense,

Than are these chances, if the origin

And end of each be heedfully compar’d.

And as one thought bursts from another forth,

So afterward from that another sprang,

Which added doubly to my former fear.

For thus I reason’d: “These through us have been

So foil’d, with loss and mock’ry so complete,

As needs must sting them sore. If anger then

Be to their evil will conjoin’d, more fell

They shall pursue us, than the savage hound

Snatches the leveret, panting ’twixt his jaws.”

Already I perceiv’d my hair stand all

On end with terror, and look’d eager back.

“Teacher,” I thus began, “if speedily

Thyself and me thou hide not, much I dread

Those evil talons. Even now behind

They urge us: quick imagination works

So forcibly, that I already feel them.”

He answer’d: “Were I form’d of leaded glass,

I should not sooner draw unto myself

Thy outward image, than I now imprint

That from within. This moment came thy thoughts

Presented before mine, with similar act

And count’nance similar, so that from both

I one design have fram’d. If the right coast

Incline so much, that we may thence descend

Into the other chasm, we shall escape

Secure from this imagined pursuit.”

He had not spoke his purpose to the end,

When I from far beheld them with spread wings

Approach to take us. Suddenly my guide

Caught me, ev’n as a mother that from sleep

Is by the noise arous’d, and near her sees

The climbing fires, who snatches up her babe

And flies ne’er pausing, careful more of him

Than of herself, that but a single vest

Clings round her limbs. Down from the jutting beach

Supine he cast him, to that pendent rock,

Which closes on one part the other chasm.

Never ran water with such hurrying pace

Adown the tube to turn a landmill’s wheel,

When nearest it approaches to the spokes,

As then along that edge my master ran,

Carrying me in his bosom, as a child,

Not a companion. Scarcely had his feet

Reach’d to the lowest of the bed beneath,
When over us the steep they reach’d; but fear

In him was none; for that high Providence,

Which plac’d them ministers of the fifth foss,

Power of departing thence took from them all.

There in the depth we saw a painted tribe,

Who pac’d with tardy steps around, and wept,

Faint in appearance and o’ercome with toil.

Caps had they on, with hoods, that fell low down

Before their eyes, in fashion like to those

Worn by the monks in Cologne. Their outside

Was overlaid with gold, dazzling to view,

But leaden all within, and of such weight,

That Frederick’s compar’d to these were straw.

Oh, everlasting wearisome attire!

We yet once more with them together turn’d

To leftward, on their dismal moan intent.

But by the weight oppress’d, so slowly came

The fainting people, that our company

Was chang’d at every movement of the step.

Whence I my guide address’d: “See that thou find

Some spirit, whose name may by his deeds be known,

And to that end look round thee as thou go’st.”

Then one, who understood the Tuscan voice,

Cried after us aloud: “Hold in your feet,

Ye who so swiftly speed through the dusk air.

Perchance from me thou shalt obtain thy wish.”

Whereat my leader, turning, me bespake:

“Pause, and then onward at their pace proceed.”

I staid, and saw two Spirits in whose look

Impatient eagerness of mind was mark’d

To overtake me; but the load they bare

And narrow path retarded their approach.

Soon as arriv’d, they with an eye askance

Perus’d me, but spake not: then turning each

To other thus conferring said: “This one

Seems, by the action of his throat, alive.

And, be they dead, what privilege allows

They walk unmantled by the cumbrous stole?”
Then thus to me: “Tuscan, who visitest

The college of the mourning hypocrites,

Disdain not to instruct us who thou art.”

“By Arno’s pleasant stream,” I thus replied,

“In the great city I was bred and grew,

And wear the body I have ever worn.

but who are ye, from whom such mighty grief,

As now I witness, courseth down your cheeks?

What torment breaks forth in this bitter woe?”

“Our bonnets gleaming bright with orange hue,”

One of them answer’d, “are so leaden gross,

That with their weight they make the balances

To crack beneath them. Joyous friars we were,

Bologna’s natives, Catalano I,

He Loderingo nam’d, and by thy land

Together taken, as men used to take

A single and indifferent arbiter,

To reconcile their strifes. How there we sped,

Gardingo’s vicinage can best declare.”

“O friars!” I began, “your miseries—”

But there brake off, for one had caught my eye,

Fix’d to a cross with three stakes on the ground:

He, when he saw me, writh’d himself, throughout

Distorted, ruffling with deep sighs his beard.

And Catalano, who thereof was ’ware,
Thus spake: “That pierced spirit, whom intent

Thou view’st, was he who gave the Pharisees

Counsel, that it were fitting for one man

To suffer for the people. He doth lie

Transverse; nor any passes, but him first

Behoves make feeling trial how each weighs.

In straits like this along the foss are plac’d

The father of his consort, and the rest

Partakers in that council, seed of ill

And sorrow to the Jews.” I noted then,

How Virgil gaz’d with wonder upon him,

Thus abjectly extended on the cross

In banishment eternal. To the friar

He next his words address’d: “We pray ye tell,

If so be lawful, whether on our right

Lies any opening in the rock, whereby

We both may issue hence, without constraint

On the dark angels, that compell’d they come

To lead us from this depth.” He thus replied:

“Nearer than thou dost hope, there is a rock

From the next circle moving, which o’ersteps

Each vale of horror, save that here his cope

Is shatter’d. By the ruin ye may mount:

For on the side it slants, and most the height

Rises below.” With head bent down awhile

My leader stood, then spake: “He warn’d us ill,

Who yonder hangs the sinners on his hook.”

To whom the friar: “At Bologna erst

I many vices of the devil heard,

Among the rest was said, ‘He is a liar,

And the father of lies!’” When he had spoke,

My leader with large strides proceeded on,

Somewhat disturb’d with anger in his look.

I therefore left the spirits heavy laden,

And following, his beloved footsteps mark’d.

CANTO XXIV

In the year’s early nonage, when the sun

Tempers his tresses in Aquarius’ urn,

And now towards equal day the nights recede,

When as the rime upon the earth puts on

Her dazzling sister’s image, but not long

Her milder sway endures, then riseth up

The village hind, whom fails his wintry store,

And looking out beholds the plain around

All whiten’d, whence impatiently he smites

His thighs, and to his hut returning in,

There paces to and fro, wailing his lot,

As a discomfited and helpless man;

Then comes he forth again, and feels new hope

Spring in his bosom, finding e’en thus soon

The world hath chang’d its count’nance, grasps his crook,

And forth to pasture drives his little flock:

So me my guide dishearten’d when I saw

His troubled forehead, and so speedily

That ill was cur’d; for at the fallen bridge

Arriving, towards me with a look as sweet,

He turn’d him back, as that I first beheld

At the steep mountain’s foot. Regarding well

The ruin, and some counsel first maintain’d

With his own thought, he open’d wide his arm

And took me up. As one, who, while he works,

Computes his labour’s issue, that he seems

Still to foresee the effect, so lifting me

Up to the summit of one peak, he fix’d

His eye upon another. “Grapple that,”

Said he, “but first make proof, if it be such

As will sustain thee.” For one capp’d with lead

This were no journey. Scarcely he, though light,

And I, though onward push’d from crag to crag,

Could mount. And if the precinct of this coast

Were not less ample than the last, for him

I know not, but my strength had surely fail’d.

But Malebolge all toward the mouth

Inclining of the nethermost abyss,

The site of every valley hence requires,

That one side upward slope, the other fall.

At length the point of our descent we reach’d

From the last flag: soon as to that arriv’d,

So was the breath exhausted from my lungs,

I could no further, but did seat me there.

“Now needs thy best of man;” so spake my guide:

“For not on downy plumes, nor under shade

Of canopy reposing, fame is won,

Without which whosoe’er consumes his days

Leaveth such vestige of himself on earth,

As smoke in air or foam upon the wave.

Thou therefore rise: vanish thy weariness

By the mind’s effort, in each struggle form’d

To vanquish, if she suffer not the weight

Of her corporeal frame to crush her down.

A longer ladder yet remains to scale.

From these to have escap’d sufficeth not.

If well thou note me, profit by my words.”

I straightway rose, and show’d myself less spent

Than I in truth did feel me. “On,” I cried,

“For I am stout and fearless.” Up the rock

Our way we held, more rugged than before,

Narrower and steeper far to climb. From talk

I ceas’d not, as we journey’d, so to seem

Least faint; whereat a voice from the other foss

Did issue forth, for utt’rance suited ill.

Though on the arch that crosses there I stood,

What were the words I knew not, but who spake

Seem’d mov’d in anger. Down I stoop’d to look,

But my quick eye might reach not to the depth

For shrouding darkness; wherefore thus I spake:

“To the next circle, Teacher, bend thy steps,

And from the wall dismount we; for as hence

I hear and understand not, so I see

Beneath, and naught discern.”—“I answer not,”

Said he, “but by the deed. To fair request

Silent performance maketh best return.”

We from the bridge’s head descended, where

To the eighth mound it joins, and then the chasm

Opening to view, I saw a crowd within

Of serpents terrible, so strange of shape

And hideous, that remembrance in my veins

Yet shrinks the vital current. Of her sands

Let Lybia vaunt no more: if Jaculus,

Pareas and Chelyder be her brood,

Cenchris and Amphisboena, plagues so dire

Or in such numbers swarming ne’er she shew’d,

Not with all Ethiopia, and whate’er

Above the Erythraean sea is spawn’d.
Amid this dread exuberance of woe

Ran naked spirits wing’d with horrid fear,

Nor hope had they of crevice where to hide,

Or heliotrope to charm them out of view.

With serpents were their hands behind them bound,

Which through their reins infix’d the tail and head

Twisted in folds before. And lo! on one

Near to our side, darted an adder up,

And, where the neck is on the shoulders tied,

Transpierc’d him. Far more quickly than e’er pen

Wrote O or I, he kindled, burn’d, and chang’d

To ashes, all pour’d out upon the earth.

When there dissolv’d he lay, the dust again

Uproll’d spontaneous, and the self-same form

Instant resumed. So mighty sages tell,

The Arabian Phoenix, when five hundred years

Have well nigh circled, dies, and springs forthwith

Renascent. Blade nor herb throughout his life

He tastes, but tears of frankincense alone

And odorous amomum: swaths of nard

And myrrh his funeral shroud. As one that falls,

He knows not how, by force demoniac dragg’d

To earth, or through obstruction fettering up

In chains invisible the powers of man,

Who, risen from his trance, gazeth around,

Bewilder’d with the monstrous agony

He hath endur’d, and wildly staring sighs;

So stood aghast the sinner when he rose.

Oh! how severe God’s judgment, that deals out

Such blows in stormy vengeance! Who he was

My teacher next inquir’d, and thus in few

He answer'd: "Vanni Fucci am I call'd,

Not long since rained down from Tuscany

To this dire gullet. Me the beastial life

And not the human pleas'd, mule that I was,

Who in Pistoia found my worthy den."

I then to Virgil: "Bid him stir not hence,

And ask what crime did thrust him hither: once

A man I knew him choleric and bloody."

The sinner heard and feign'd not, but towards me

His mind directing and his face, wherein

Was dismal shame depictur'd, thus he spake:

"It grieves me more to have been caught by thee

In this sad plight, which thou beholdest, than

When I was taken from the other life.

I have no power permitted to deny

What thou inquirest.” I am doom’d thus low

To dwell, for that the sacristy by me

Was rifled of its goodly ornaments,

And with the guilt another falsely charged.

But that thou mayst not joy to see me thus,

So as thou e’er shalt ’scape this darksome realm

Open thine ears and hear what I forebode.

Reft of the Neri first Pistoia pines,

Then Florence changeth citizens and laws.

From Valdimagra, drawn by wrathful Mars,

A vapour rises, wrapt in turbid mists,

And sharp and eager driveth on the storm

With arrowy hurtling o’er Piceno’s field,

Whence suddenly the cloud shall burst, and strike

Each helpless Bianco prostrate to the ground.

This have I told, that grief may rend thy heart.”

CANTO XXV

When he had spoke, the sinner rais’d his hands

Pointed in mockery, and cried: “Take them, God!

I level them at thee!” From that day forth

The serpents were my friends; for round his neck

One of then rolling twisted, as it said,

“Be silent, tongue!” Another to his arms

Upgliding, tied them, riveting itself

So close, it took from them the power to move.

Pistoia! Ah Pistoia! why dost doubt

To turn thee into ashes, cumb’ring earth

No longer, since in evil act so far

Thou hast outdone thy seed? I did not mark,

Through all the gloomy circles of the abyss,

Spirit, that swell’d so proudly ’gainst his God,

Not him, who headlong fell from Thebes. He fled,

Nor utter’d more; and after him there came

A centaur full of fury, shouting, “Where

Where is the caitiff?” On Maremma’s marsh

Swarm not the serpent tribe, as on his haunch

They swarm’d, to where the human face begins.

Behind his head upon the shoulders lay,

With open wings, a dragon breathing fire

On whomsoe’er he met. To me my guide:

“Cacus is this, who underneath the rock

Of Aventine spread oft a lake of blood.

He, from his brethren parted, here must tread

A different journey, for his fraudful theft

Of the great herd, that near him stall’d; whence found

His felon deeds their end, beneath the mace

Of stout Alcides, that perchance laid on

A hundred blows, and not the tenth was felt.”

While yet he spake, the centaur sped away:

And under us three spirits came, of whom

Nor I nor he was ware, till they exclaim’d;

“Say who are ye?” We then brake off discourse,

Intent on these alone. I knew them not;

But, as it chanceth oft, befell, that one

Had need to name another. “Where,” said he,

“Doth Cianfa lurk?” I, for a sign my guide

Should stand attentive, plac’d against my lips

The finger lifted. If, O reader! now

Thou be not apt to credit what I tell,

No marvel; for myself do scarce allow

The witness of mine eyes. But as I looked

Toward them, lo! a serpent with six feet

Springs forth on one, and fastens full upon him:

His midmost grasp’d the belly, a forefoot

Seiz’d on each arm (while deep in either cheek

He flesh’d his fangs); the hinder on the thighs

Were spread, ’twixt which the tail inserted curl’d

Upon the reins behind. Ivy ne’er clasp’d

A dodder’d oak, as round the other’s limbs

The hideous monster intertwin’d his own.

Then, as they both had been of burning wax,

Each melted into other, mingling hues,

That which was either now was seen no more.

Thus up the shrinking paper, ere it burns,

A brown tint glides, not turning yet to black,

And the clean white expires. The other two

Look’d on exclaiming: “Ah, how dost thou change,

Agnello! See! Thou art nor double now,
“Nor only one.” The two heads now became

One, and two figures blended in one form

Appear’d, where both were lost. Of the four lengths

Two arms were made: the belly and the chest

The thighs and legs into such members chang’d,

As never eye hath seen. Of former shape

All trace was vanish’d. Two yet neither seem’d

That image miscreate, and so pass’d on

With tardy steps. As underneath the scourge

Of the fierce dog-star, that lays bare the fields,

Shifting from brake to brake, the lizard seems

A flash of lightning, if he thwart the road,

So toward th’ entrails of the other two

Approaching seem’d, an adder all on fire,

As the dark pepper-grain, livid and swart.

In that part, whence our life is nourish’d first,

One he transpierc’d; then down before him fell

Stretch’d out. The pierced spirit look’d on him

But spake not; yea stood motionless and yawn’d,

As if by sleep or fev’rous fit assail’d.

He ey’d the serpent, and the serpent him.

One from the wound, the other from the mouth

Breath’d a thick smoke, whose vap’ry columns join’d.

Lucan in mute attention now may hear,

Nor thy disastrous fate, Sabellus! tell,

Nor shine, Nasidius! Ovid now be mute.

What if in warbling fiction he record

Cadmus and Arethusa, to a snake

Him chang’d, and her into a fountain clear,

I envy not; for never face to face

Two natures thus transmuted did he sing,

Wherein both shapes were ready to assume

The other’s substance. They in mutual guise

So answer’d, that the serpent split his train

Divided to a fork, and the pierc’d spirit

Drew close his steps together, legs and thighs

Compacted, that no sign of juncture soon

Was visible: the tail disparted took

The figure which the spirit lost, its skin

Soft’ning, his indurated to a rind.

The shoulders next I mark’d, that ent’ring join’d

The monster’s arm-pits, whose two shorter feet

So lengthen’d, as the other’s dwindling shrunk.

The feet behind then twisting up became

That part that man conceals, which in the wretch

Was cleft in twain. While both the shadowy smoke

With a new colour veils, and generates

Th’ excrescent pile on one, peeling it off

From th’ other body, lo! upon his feet

One upright rose, and prone the other fell.

Not yet their glaring and malignant lamps

Were shifted, though each feature chang’d beneath.

Of him who stood erect, the mounting face

Retreated towards the temples, and what there

Superfluous matter came, shot out in ears

From the smooth cheeks, the rest, not backward dragg’d,

Of its excess did shape the nose; and swell’d

Into due size protuberant the lips.

He, on the earth who lay, meanwhile extends

His sharpen’d visage, and draws down the ears

Into the head, as doth the slug his horns.

His tongue continuous before and apt

For utt’rance, severs; and the other’s fork

Closing unites. That done the smoke was laid.

The soul, transform’d into the brute, glides off,

Hissing along the vale, and after him

The other talking sputters; but soon turn’d

His new-grown shoulders on him, and in few

Thus to another spake: “Along this path

Crawling, as I have done, speed Buoso now!”

So saw I fluctuate in successive change

Th’ unsteady ballast of the seventh hold:

And here if aught my tongue have swerv’d, events

So strange may be its warrant. O’er mine eyes

Confusion hung, and on my thoughts amaze.

Yet ’scap’d they not so covertly, but well

I mark’d Sciancato: he alone it was

Of the three first that came, who chang’d not: thou,

The other’s fate, Gaville, still dost rue.

CANTO XXVI

Florence exult! for thou so mightily

Hast thriven, that o’er land and sea thy wings

Thou beatest, and thy name spreads over hell!

Among the plund’rers such the three I found

Thy citizens, whence shame to me thy son,

And no proud honour to thyself redounds.

But if our minds, when dreaming near the dawn,

Are of the truth presageful, thou ere long

Shalt feel what Prato, (not to say the rest)

Would fain might come upon thee; and that chance

Were in good time, if it befell thee now.

Would so it were, since it must needs befall!

For as time wears me, I shall grieve the more.

We from the depth departed; and my guide

Remounting scal’d the flinty steps, which late

We downward trac’d, and drew me up the steep.

Pursuing thus our solitary way

Among the crags and splinters of the rock,

Sped not our feet without the help of hands.

Then sorrow seiz’d me, which e’en now revives,

As my thought turns again to what I saw,

And, more than I am wont, I rein and curb

The powers of nature in me, lest they run

Where Virtue guides not; that if aught of good

My gentle star, or something better gave me,

I envy not myself the precious boon.

As in that season, when the sun least veils

His face that lightens all, what time the fly

Gives way to the shrill gnat, the peasant then

Upon some cliff reclin’d, beneath him sees

Fire-flies innumerous spangling o’er the vale,

Vineyard or tilth, where his day-labour lies:

With flames so numberless throughout its space

Shone the eighth chasm, apparent, when the depth

Was to my view expos’d. As he, whose wrongs

The bears aveng’d, at its departure saw

Elijah’s chariot, when the steeds erect

Rais’d their steep flight for heav’n; his eyes meanwhile,

Straining pursu’d them, till the flame alone

Upsoaring like a misty speck he kenn’d;

E’en thus along the gulf moves every flame,

A sinner so enfolded close in each,

That none exhibits token of the theft.

Upon the bridge I forward bent to look,

And grasp’d a flinty mass, or else had fall’n,

Though push’d not from the height. The guide, who mark’d

How I did gaze attentive, thus began:
“Within these ardours are the spirits, each

Swath’d in confining fire.”—“Master, thy word,”

I answer’d, “hath assur’d me; yet I deem’d

Already of the truth, already wish’d

To ask thee, who is in yon fire, that comes

So parted at the summit, as it seem’d

Ascending from that funeral pile, where lay

The Theban brothers?" He replied: "Within

Ulysses there and Diomede endure

Their penal tortures, thus to vengeance now

Together hasting, as erewhile to wrath.

These in the flame with ceaseless groans deplore

The ambush of the horse, that open'd wide

A portal for that goodly seed to pass,

Which sow'd imperial Rome; nor less the guile

Lament they, whence of her Achilles 'reft

Deidamia yet in death complains.

And there is rued the stratagem, that Troy

Of her Palladium spoil'd."—"If they have power

Of utt'rance from within these sparks," said I,

"O master! think my prayer a thousand fold

In repetition urg’d, that thou vouchsafe

To pause, till here the horned flame arrive.

See, how toward it with desire I bend.”

He thus: “Thy prayer is worthy of much praise,

And I accept it therefore: but do thou

Thy tongue refrain: to question them be mine,

For I divine thy wish: and they perchance,

For they were Greeks, might shun discourse with thee.”

When there the flame had come, where time and place

Seem’d fitting to my guide, he thus began:

“O ye, who dwell two spirits in one fire!

If living I of you did merit aught,

Whate’er the measure were of that desert,

When in the world my lofty strain I pour’d,

Move ye not on, till one of you unfold

In what clime death o’ertook him self-destroy’d.”

Of the old flame forthwith the greater horn

Began to roll, murmuring, as a fire

That labours with the wind, then to and fro

Wagging the top, as a tongue uttering sounds,

Threw out its voice, and spake: “When I escap’d

From Circe, who beyond a circling year

Had held me near Caieta, by her charms,

Ere thus Aeneas yet had nam’d the shore,

Nor fondness for my son, nor reverence

Of my old father, nor return of love,

That should have crown’d Penelope with joy,

Could overcome in me the zeal I had

T’ explore the world, and search the ways of life,

Man’s evil and his virtue. Forth I sail’d

Into the deep illimitable main,

With but one bark, and the small faithful band

That yet cleav’d to me. As Iberia far,

Far as Morocco either shore I saw,

And the Sardinian and each isle beside

Which round that ocean bathes. Tardy with age

Were I and my companions, when we came

To the strait pass, where Hercules ordain’d

The bound’ries not to be o’erstepp’d by man.

The walls of Seville to my right I left,

On the other hand already Ceuta past.

“O brothers!” I began, “who to the west

Through perils without number now have reach’d,

To this the short remaining watch, that yet

Our senses have to wake, refuse not proof

Of the unpeopled world, following the track

Of Phoebus. Call to mind from whence we sprang:

Ye were not form’d to live the life of brutes

But virtue to pursue and knowledge high.”

With these few words I sharpen’d for the voyage

The mind of my associates, that I then

Could scarcely have withheld them. To the dawn

Our poop we turn’d, and for the witless flight

Made our oars wings, still gaining on the left.

Each star of the other pole night now beheld,

And ours so low, that from the ocean-floor

It rose not. Five times re-illum’d, as oft

Vanish’d the light from underneath the moon

Since the deep way we enter’d, when from far

Appear’d a mountain dim, loftiest methought

Of all I e’er beheld. Joy seiz’d us straight,

But soon to mourning changed. From the new land

A whirlwind sprung, and at her foremost side

Did strike the vessel. Thrice it whirl’d her round

With all the waves, the fourth time lifted up

The poop, and sank the prow: so fate decreed:

And over us the booming billow clos’d.”

CANTO XXVII

Now upward rose the flame, and still’d its light

To speak no more, and now pass’d on with leave

From the mild poet gain’d, when following came

Another, from whose top a sound confus’d,

Forth issuing, drew our eyes that way to look.

As the Sicilian bull, that rightfully

His cries first echoed, who had shap’d its mould,

Did so rebellow, with the voice of him

Tormented, that the brazen monster seem’d

Pierc’d through with pain; thus while no way they found

Nor avenue immediate through the flame,

Into its language turn’d the dismal words:

But soon as they had won their passage forth,

Up from the point, which vibrating obey’d

Their motion at the tongue, these sounds we heard:

“O thou! to whom I now direct my voice!

That lately didst exclaim in Lombard phrase,

‘Depart thou, I solicit thee no more,’

Though somewhat tardy I perchance arrive

Let it not irk thee here to pause awhile,

And with me parley: lo! it irks not me

And yet I burn. If but e’en now thou fall

into this blind world, from that pleasant land

Of Latium, whence I draw my sum of guilt,

Tell me if those, who in Romagna dwell,

Have peace or war. For of the mountains there

Was I, betwixt Urbino and the height,

Whence Tyber first unlocks his mighty flood.”

Leaning I listen’d yet with heedful ear,

When, as he touch’d my side, the leader thus:

“Speak thou: he is a Latian.” My reply

Was ready, and I spake without delay:

“O spirit! who art hidden here below!

Never was thy Romagna without war

In her proud tyrants’ bosoms, nor is now:

But open war there left I none. The state,

Ravenna hath maintain’d this many a year,

Is steadfast. There Polenta’s eagle broods,

And in his broad circumference of plume

O’ershadows Cervia. The green talons grasp

The land, that stood erewhile the proof so long,

And pil’d in bloody heap the host of France.

“The old mastiff of Verruchio and the young,

That tore Montagna in their wrath, still make,

Where they are wont, an augre of their fangs.

“Lamone’s city and Santerno’s range

Under the lion of the snowy lair.

Inconstant partisan! that changeth sides,

Or ever summer yields to winter’s frost.

And she, whose flank is wash’d of Savio’s wave,

As ’twixt the level and the steep she lies,

Lives so ’twixt tyrant power and liberty.

“Now tell us, I entreat thee, who art thou?

Be not more hard than others. In the world,

So may thy name still rear its forehead high.”

Then roar’d awhile the fire, its sharpen’d point

On either side wav’d, and thus breath’d at last:

“If I did think, my answer were to one,

Who ever could return unto the world,

This flame should rest unshaken. But since ne’er,

If true be told me, any from this depth

Has found his upward way, I answer thee,

Nor fear lest infamy record the words.

“A man of arms at first, I cloth’d me then

In good Saint Francis’ girdle, hoping so

T’ have made amends. And certainly my hope

Had fail’d not, but that he, whom curses light on,

The high priest again seduc’d me into sin.

And how and wherefore listen while I tell.

Long as this spirit mov’d the bones and pulp

My mother gave me, less my deeds bespake

The nature of the lion than the fox.

All ways of winding subtlety I knew,

And with such art conducted, that the sound

Reach’d the world’s limit. Soon as to that part

Of life I found me come, when each behoves

To lower sails and gather in the lines;

That which before had pleased me then I rued,

And to repentance and confession turn’d;

Wretch that I was! and well it had bested me!

The chief of the new Pharisees meantime,

Waging his warfare near the Lateran,

Not with the Saracens or Jews (his foes

All Christians were, nor against Acre one

Had fought, nor traffic’d in the Soldan’s land),

He his great charge nor sacred ministry

In himself, rev’renc’d, nor in me that cord,

Which us’d to mark with leanness whom it girded.

As in Socrate, Constantine besought

To cure his leprosy Sylvester’s aid,

So me to cure the fever of his pride

This man besought: my counsel to that end

He ask’d: and I was silent: for his words

Seem’d drunken: but forthwith he thus resum’d:

“From thy heart banish fear: of all offence

I hitherto absolve thee. In return,

Teach me my purpose so to execute,

That Penestrino cumber earth no more.

Heav’n, as thou knowest, I have power to shut

And open: and the keys are therefore twain,

The which my predecessor meanly priz’d.”

Then, yielding to the forceful arguments,

Of silence as more perilous I deem’d,

And answer’d: “Father! since thou washest me

Clear of that guilt wherein I now must fall,

Large promise with performance scant, be sure,

Shall make thee triumph in thy lofty seat.”

“When I was number’d with the dead, then came

Saint Francis for me; but a cherub dark

He met, who cried: “‘Wrong me not; he is mine,

And must below to join the wretched crew,

For the deceitful counsel which he gave.

E’er since I watch’d him, hov’ring at his hair,

No power can the impenitent absolve;

Nor to repent and will at once consist,

By contradiction absolute forbid.”

Oh mis’ry! how I shook myself, when he

Seiz’d me, and cried, “Thou haply thought’st me not

A disputant in logic so exact.”

To Minos down he bore me, and the judge

Twin’d eight times round his callous back the tail,

Which biting with excess of rage, he spake:

‘This is a guilty soul, that in the fire

Must vanish.’ Hence perdition-doom’d I rove

A prey to rankling sorrow in this garb.”

When he had thus fulfill’d his words, the flame

In dolour parted, beating to and fro,

And writhing its sharp horn. We onward went,

I and my leader, up along the rock,

Far as another arch, that overhangs

The foss, wherein the penalty is paid

Of those, who load them with committed sin.

CANTO XXVIII

Who, e’en in words unfetter’d, might at full

Tell of the wounds and blood that now I saw,

Though he repeated oft the tale? No tongue

So vast a theme could equal, speech and thought

Both impotent alike. If in one band

Collected, stood the people all, who e’er

Pour’d on Apulia’s happy soil their blood,

Slain by the Trojans, and in that long war

When of the rings the measur’d booty made

A pile so high, as Rome’s historian writes

Who errs not, with the multitude, that felt

The grinding force of Guiscard’s Norman steel,

And those the rest, whose bones are gather’d yet

At Ceperano, there where treachery

Branded th’ Apulian name, or where beyond

Thy walls, O Tagliacozzo, without arms

The old Alardo conquer’d; and his limbs

One were to show transpierc’d, another his

Clean lopt away; a spectacle like this

Were but a thing of nought, to the hideous sight

Of the ninth chasm. A rundlet, that hath lost

Its middle or side stave, gapes not so wide,

As one I mark’d, torn from the chin throughout

Down to the hinder passage: ’twixt the legs

Dangling his entrails hung, the midriff lay

Open to view, and wretched ventricle,

That turns th’ englutted aliment to dross.

Whilst eagerly I fix on him my gaze,

He ey’d me, with his hands laid his breast bare,

And cried; “Now mark how I do rip me! lo!
“How is Mohammed mangled! before me

Walks Ali weeping, from the chin his face

Cleft to the forelock; and the others all

Whom here thou seest, while they liv’d, did sow

Scandal and schism, and therefore thus are rent.

A fiend is here behind, who with his sword

Hacks us thus cruelly, slivering again

Each of this ream, when we have compast round

The dismal way, for first our gashes close

Ere we repass before him. But say who

Art thou, that standest musing on the rock,

Haply so lingering to delay the pain

Sentenc’d upon thy crimes?”—“Him death not yet,”

My guide rejoin’d, “hath overta’en, nor sin

Conducts to torment; but, that he may make

Full trial of your state, I who am dead

Must through the depths of hell, from orb to orb,

Conduct him. Trust my words, for they are true.”

More than a hundred spirits, when that they heard,

Stood in the foss to mark me, through amazed,

Forgetful of their pangs. “Thou, who perchance

Shalt shortly view the sun, this warning thou

Bear to Dolcino: bid him, if he wish not

Here soon to follow me, that with good store

Of food he arm him, lest impris’ning snows

Yield him a victim to Novara’s power,

No easy conquest else.” With foot uprais’d

For stepping, spake Mohammed, on the ground

Then fix’d it to depart. Another shade,

Pierc’d in the throat, his nostrils mutilate

E’en from beneath the eyebrows, and one ear

Lopt off, who with the rest through wonder stood

Gazing, before the rest advanc’d, and bar’d

His wind-pipe, that without was all o’ersmear’d

With crimson stain. “O thou!” said ‘he, “whom sin

Condemns not, and whom erst (unless too near

Resemblance do deceive me) I aloft

Have seen on Latian ground, call thou to mind

Piero of Medicina, if again

Returning, thou behold’st the pleasant land

That from Vercelli slopes to Mercabo;
“And there instruct the twain, whom Fano boasts

Her worthiest sons, Guido and Angelo,

That if ’t is giv’n us here to scan aright

The future, they out of life’s tenement

Shall be cast forth, and whelm’d under the waves

Near to Cattolica, through perfidy

Of a fell tyrant. ’Twixt the Cyprian isle

And Balearic, ne’er hath Neptune seen

An injury so foul, by pirates done

Or Argive crew of old. That one-ey’d traitor

(Whose realm there is a spirit here were fain

His eye had still lack’d sight of) them shall bring

To conf’rence with him, then so shape his end,

That they shall need not ’gainst Focara’s wind

Offer up vow nor pray’r.” I answering thus:

“Declare, as thou dost wish that I above

May carry tidings of thee, who is he,

In whom that sight doth wake such sad remembrance?”

Forthwith he laid his hand on the cheek-bone

Of one, his fellow-spirit, and his jaws

Expanding, cried: “Lo! this is he I wot of;

He speaks not for himself: the outcast this

Who overwhelm’d the doubt in Caesar’s mind,

Affirming that delay to men prepar’d

Was ever harmful. “Oh how terrified

Methought was Curio, from whose throat was cut

The tongue, which spake that hardy word. Then one

Maim’d of each hand, uplifted in the gloom

The bleeding stumps, that they with gory spots

Sullied his face, and cried: ‘Remember thee

Of Mosca, too, I who, alas! exclaim’d,

“The deed once done there is an end,” that prov’d

A seed of sorrow to the Tuscan race.”

I added: “Ay, and death to thine own tribe.”

Whence heaping woe on woe he hurried off,

As one grief-stung to madness. But I there

Still linger’d to behold the troop, and saw

Things, such as I may fear without more proof

To tell of, but that conscience makes me firm,

The boon companion, who her strong breast-plate

Buckles on him, that feels no guilt within

And bids him on and fear not. Without doubt

I saw, and yet it seems to pass before me,

A headless trunk, that even as the rest

Of the sad flock pac’d onward. By the hair

It bore the sever’d member, lantern-wise

Pendent in hand, which look’d at us and said,
“Woe’s me!” The spirit lighted thus himself,

And two there were in one, and one in two.

How that may be he knows who ordereth so.

When at the bridge’s foot direct he stood,

His arm aloft he rear’d, thrusting the head

Full in our view, that nearer we might hear

The words, which thus it utter’d: “Now behold

This grievous torment, thou, who breathing go’st

To spy the dead; behold if any else

Be terrible as this. And that on earth

Thou mayst bear tidings of me, know that I

Am Bertrand, he of Born, who gave King John

The counsel mischievous. Father and son

I set at mutual war. For Absalom

And David more did not Ahitophel,

Spurring them on maliciously to strife.

For parting those so closely knit, my brain

Parted, alas! I carry from its source,

That in this trunk inhabits. Thus the law

Of retribution fiercely works in me.”

CANTO XXIX

So were mine eyes inebriate with view

Of the vast multitude, whom various wounds

Disfigur’d, that they long’d to stay and weep.
But Virgil rous’d me: “What yet gazest on?

Wherefore doth fasten yet thy sight below

Among the maim’d and miserable shades?

Thou hast not shewn in any chasm beside

This weakness. Know, if thou wouldst number them

That two and twenty miles the valley winds

Its circuit, and already is the moon

Beneath our feet: the time permitted now

Is short, and more not seen remains to see.”

“If thou,” I straight replied, “hadst weigh’d the cause

For which I look’d, thou hadst perchance excus’d

The tarrying still.” My leader part pursu’d

His way, the while I follow’d, answering him,

And adding thus: “Within that cave I deem,

Whereon so fixedly I held my ken,

There is a spirit dwells, one of my blood,

Wailing the crime that costs him now so dear.”

Then spake my master: “Let thy soul no more

Afflict itself for him. Direct elsewhere

Its thought, and leave him. At the bridge’s foot

I mark’d how he did point with menacing look

At thee, and heard him by the others nam’d

Geri of Bello. Thou so wholly then

Wert busied with his spirit, who once rul’d

The towers of Hautefort, that thou lookedst not

That way, ere he was gone.”—“O guide belov’d!

His violent death yet unaveng’d,” said I,

“By any, who are partners in his shame,

Made him contemptuous: therefore, as I think,

He pass’d me speechless by; and doing so

Hath made me more compassionate his fate.”

So we discours’d to where the rock first show’d

The other valley, had more light been there,

E’en to the lowest depth. Soon as we came

O’er the last cloister in the dismal rounds

Of Malebolge, and the brotherhood

Were to our view expos’d, then many a dart

Of sore lament assail’d me, headed all

With points of thrilling pity, that I clos’d

Both ears against the volley with mine hands.

As were the torment, if each lazar-house

Of Valdichiana, in the sultry time

’Twixt July and September, with the isle

Sardinia and Maremma’s pestilent fen,

Had heap’d their maladies all in one foss

Together; such was here the torment: dire

The stench, as issuing steams from fester’d limbs.

We on the utmost shore of the long rock

Descended still to leftward. Then my sight

Was livelier to explore the depth, wherein

The minister of the most mighty Lord,

All-searching Justice, dooms to punishment

The forgers noted on her dread record.

More rueful was it not methinks to see

The nation in Aegina droop, what time

Each living thing, e’en to the little worm,

All fell, so full of malice was the air

(And afterward, as bards of yore have told,

The ancient people were restor’d anew

From seed of emmets) than was here to see

The spirits, that languish’d through the murky vale

Up-pil’d on many a stack. Confus’d they lay,

One o’er the belly, o’er the shoulders one

Roll’d of another; sideling crawl’d a third

Along the dismal pathway. Step by step

We journey’d on, in silence looking round

And list’ning those diseas’d, who strove in vain

To lift their forms. Then two I mark’d, that sat

Propp’d ’gainst each other, as two brazen pans

Set to retain the heat. From head to foot,

A tetter bark’d them round. Nor saw I e’er

Groom currying so fast, for whom his lord

Impatient waited, or himself perchance

Tir’d with long watching, as of these each one

Plied quickly his keen nails, through furiousness

Of ne’er abated pruriency. The crust

Came drawn from underneath in flakes, like scales

Scrap’d from the bream or fish of broader mail.
“O thou, who with thy fingers rendest off

Thy coat of proof,” thus spake my guide to one,

“And sometimes makest tearing pincers of them,

Tell me if any born of Latian land

Be among these within: so may thy nails

Serve thee for everlasting to this toil.”

“Both are of Latium,” weeping he replied,

“Whom tortur’d thus thou seest: but who art thou

That hast inquir’d of us?” To whom my guide:

“One that descend with this man, who yet lives,

From rock to rock, and show him hell’s abyss.”

Then started they asunder, and each turn’d

Trembling toward us, with the rest, whose ear

Those words redounding struck. To me my liege

Address’d him: “Speak to them whate’er thou list.”

And I therewith began: “So may no time

Filch your remembrance from the thoughts of men

In th’ upper world, but after many suns

Survive it, as ye tell me, who ye are,

And of what race ye come. Your punishment,

Unseemly and disgustful in its kind,

Deter you not from opening thus much to me.”

“Arezzo was my dwelling,” answer’d one,

“And me Albero of Sienna brought

To die by fire; but that, for which I died,

Leads me not here. True is in sport I told him,

That I had learn’d to wing my flight in air.

And he admiring much, as he was void

Of wisdom, will’d me to declare to him

The secret of mine art: and only hence,

Because I made him not a Daedalus,

Prevail’d on one suppos’d his sire to burn me.

But Minos to this chasm last of the ten,

For that I practis’d alchemy on earth,

Has doom’d me. Him no subterfuge eludes.”

Then to the bard I spake: “Was ever race

Light as Sienna’s? Sure not France herself

Can show a tribe so frivolous and vain.”

The other leprous spirit heard my words,

And thus return’d: “Be Stricca from this charge

Exempted, he who knew so temp’rately

To lay out fortune’s gifts; and Niccolo

Who first the spice’s costly luxury

Discover’d in that garden, where such seed

Roots deepest in the soil: and be that troop

Exempted, with whom Caccia of Asciano

Lavish’d his vineyards and wide-spreading woods,

And his rare wisdom Abbagliato show’d

A spectacle for all. That thou mayst know

Who seconds thee against the Siennese

Thus gladly, bend this way thy sharpen’d sight,

That well my face may answer to thy ken;

So shalt thou see I am Capocchio’s ghost,

Who forg’d transmuted metals by the power

Of alchemy; and if I scan thee right,

Thus needs must well remember how I aped

Creative nature by my subtle art.”

CANTO XXX

What time resentment burn’d in Juno’s breast

For Semele against the Theban blood,

As more than once in dire mischance was rued,

Such fatal frenzy seiz’d on Athamas,

That he his spouse beholding with a babe

Laden on either arm, “Spread out,” he cried,

“The meshes, that I take the lioness

And the young lions at the pass:” then forth

Stretch’d he his merciless talons, grasping one,

One helpless innocent, Learchus nam’d,

Whom swinging down he dash’d upon a rock,

And with her other burden self-destroy’d

The hapless mother plung’d: and when the pride

Of all-presuming Troy fell from its height,

By fortune overwhelm’d, and the old king

With his realm perish’d, then did Hecuba,

A wretch forlorn and captive, when she saw

Polyxena first slaughter’d, and her son,

Her Polydorus, on the wild sea-beach

Next met the mourner’s view, then reft of sense

Did she run barking even as a dog;

Such mighty power had grief to wrench her soul.

Bet ne’er the Furies or of Thebes or Troy

With such fell cruelty were seen, their goads

Infixing in the limbs of man or beast,

As now two pale and naked ghost I saw

That gnarling wildly scamper’d, like the swine

Excluded from his stye. One reach’d Capocchio,

And in the neck-joint sticking deep his fangs,

Dragg’d him, that o’er the solid pavement rubb’d

His belly stretch’d out prone. The other shape,

He of Arezzo, there left trembling, spake;

“That sprite of air is Schicchi; in like mood

Of random mischief vents he still his spite.”
To whom I answ’ring: “Oh! as thou dost hope,

The other may not flesh its jaws on thee,

Be patient to inform us, who it is,

Ere it speed hence.”—“That is the ancient soul

Of wretched Myrrha," he replied, "who burn'd

With most unholy flame for her own sire,
"And a false shape assuming, so perform'd

The deed of sin; e'en as the other there,

That onward passes, dar'd to counterfeit

Donati's features, to feign'd testament

The seal affixing, that himself might gain,

For his own share, the lady of the herd."

When vanish'd the two furious shades, on whom

Mine eye was held, I turn'd it back to view

The other cursed spirits. One I saw

In fashion like a lute, had but the groin

Been sever'd, where it meets the forked part.

Swoln dropsy, disproportioning the limbs

With ill-converted moisture, that the paunch

Suits not the visage, open’d wide his lips

Gasping as in the hectic man for drought,

One towards the chin, the other upward curl’d.

“O ye, who in this world of misery,

Wherefore I know not, are exempt from pain,”

Thus he began, “attentively regard

Adamo’s woe. When living, full supply

Ne’er lack’d me of what most I coveted;

One drop of water now, alas! I crave.

The rills, that glitter down the grassy slopes

Of Casentino, making fresh and soft

The banks whereby they glide to Arno’s stream,

Stand ever in my view; and not in vain;

For more the pictur’d semblance dries me up,

Much more than the disease, which makes the flesh

Desert these shrivel’d cheeks. So from the place,

Where I transgress’d, stern justice urging me,

Takes means to quicken more my lab’ring sighs.

There is Romena, where I falsified

The metal with the Baptist’s form imprest,

For which on earth I left my body burnt.

But if I here might see the sorrowing soul

Of Guido, Alessandro, or their brother,

For Branda’s limpid spring I would not change

The welcome sight. One is e’en now within,

If truly the mad spirits tell, that round

Are wand’ring. But wherein besteads me that?

My limbs are fetter’d. Were I but so light,

That I each hundred years might move one inch,

I had set forth already on this path,

Seeking him out amidst the shapeless crew,

Although eleven miles it wind, not more

Than half of one across. They brought me down

Among this tribe; induc’d by them I stamp’d

The florens with three carats of alloy.”

“Who are that abject pair,” I next inquir’d,

“That closely bounding thee upon thy right

Lie smoking, like a band in winter steep’d

In the chill stream?”—“When to this gulf I dropt,”

He answer’d, “here I found them; since that hour

They have not turn’d, nor ever shall, I ween,

Till time hath run his course. One is that dame

The false accuser of the Hebrew youth;

Sinon the other, that false Greek from Troy.

Sharp fever drains the reeky moistness out,

In such a cloud upsteam’d.” When that he heard,

One, gall’d perchance to be so darkly nam’d,

With clench’d hand smote him on the braced paunch,

That like a drum resounded: but forthwith

Adamo smote him on the face, the blow

Returning with his arm, that seem’d as hard.

“Though my o’erweighty limbs have ta’en from me

The power to move,” said he, “I have an arm

At liberty for such employ.” To whom

Was answer’d: “When thou wentest to the fire,

Thou hadst it not so ready at command,

Then readier when it coin’d th’ impostor gold.”

And thus the dropsied: “Ay, now speak’st thou true.

But there thou gav’st not such true testimony,

When thou wast question’d of the truth, at Troy.”

“If I spake false, thou falsely stamp’dst the coin,”

Said Sinon; “I am here but for one fault,

And thou for more than any imp beside.”

“Remember,” he replied, “O perjur’d one,

The horse remember, that did teem with death,

And all the world be witness to thy guilt.”

“To thine,” return’d the Greek, “witness the thirst

Whence thy tongue cracks, witness the fluid mound,

Rear’d by thy belly up before thine eyes,

A mass corrupt.” To whom the coiner thus:

“Thy mouth gapes wide as ever to let pass

Its evil saying. Me if thirst assails,

Yet I am stuff’d with moisture. Thou art parch’d,

Pains rack thy head, no urging would’st thou need

To make thee lap Narcissus’ mirror up.”

I was all fix’d to listen, when my guide

Admonish’d: “Now beware: a little more,

And I do quarrel with thee.” I perceiv’d

How angrily he spake, and towards him turn’d

With shame so poignant, as remember’d yet

Confounds me. As a man that dreams of harm

Befall’n him, dreaming wishes it a dream,

And that which is, desires as if it were not,

Such then was I, who wanting power to speak

Wish’d to excuse myself, and all the while

Excus’d me, though unweeting that I did.

“More grievous fault than thine has been, less shame,”

My master cried, “might expiate. Therefore cast

All sorrow from thy soul; and if again

Chance bring thee, where like conference is held,

Think I am ever at thy side. To hear

Such wrangling is a joy for vulgar minds.”

CANTO XXXI

The very tongue, whose keen reproof before

Had wounded me, that either cheek was stain’d,

Now minister’d my cure. So have I heard,

Achilles and his father’s javelin caus’d

Pain first, and then the boon of health restor’d.

Turning our back upon the vale of woe,

W cross’d th’ encircled mound in silence. There

Was twilight dim, that far long the gloom

Mine eye advanc’d not: but I heard a horn

Sounded aloud. The peal it blew had made

The thunder feeble. Following its course

The adverse way, my strained eyes were bent

On that one spot. So terrible a blast

Orlando blew not, when that dismal rout

O’erthrew the host of Charlemagne, and quench’d

His saintly warfare. Thitherward not long

My head was rais’d, when many lofty towers

Methought I spied. “Master,” said I, “what land

Is this?” He answer’d straight: “Too long a space

Of intervening darkness has thine eye

To traverse: thou hast therefore widely err’d

In thy imagining. Thither arriv’d

Thou well shalt see, how distance can delude

The sense. A little therefore urge thee on.”

Then tenderly he caught me by the hand;

“Yet know,” said he, “ere farther we advance,

That it less strange may seem, these are not towers,

But giants. In the pit they stand immers’d,

Each from his navel downward, round the bank.”

As when a fog disperseth gradually,

Our vision traces what the mist involves

Condens’d in air; so piercing through the gross

And gloomy atmosphere, as more and more

We near'd toward the brink, mine error fled,

And fear came o'er me. As with circling round

Of turrets, Montereggion crowns his walls,

E'en thus the shore, encompassing th' abyss,

Was turreted with giants, half their length

Uprearing, horrible, whom Jove from heav'n

Yet threatens, when his mutt'ring thunder rolls.

Of one already I descried the face,

Shoulders, and breast, and of the belly huge

Great part, and both arms down along his ribs.

All-teeming nature, when her plastic hand

Left framing of these monsters, did display

Past doubt her wisdom, taking from mad War

Such slaves to do his bidding; and if she

Repent her not of th’ elephant and whale,

Who ponders well confesses her therein

Wiser and more discreet; for when brute force

And evil will are back’d with subtlety,

Resistance none avails. His visage seem’d

In length and bulk, as doth the pine, that tops

Saint Peter’s Roman fane; and th’ other bones

Of like proportion, so that from above

The bank, which girdled him below, such height

Arose his stature, that three Friezelanders

Had striv’n in vain to reach but to his hair.

Full thirty ample palms was he expos’d

Downward from whence a man his garments loops.

“Raphel bai ameth sabi almi,”

So shouted his fierce lips, which sweeter hymns

Became not; and my guide address’d him thus:
“O senseless spirit! let thy horn for thee

Interpret: therewith vent thy rage, if rage

Or other passion wring thee. Search thy neck,

There shalt thou find the belt that binds it on.

Wild spirit! lo, upon thy mighty breast

Where hangs the baldrick!” Then to me he spake:

“He doth accuse himself. Nimrod is this,

Through whose ill counsel in the world no more

One tongue prevails. But pass we on, nor waste

Our words; for so each language is to him,

As his to others, understood by none.”

Then to the leftward turning sped we forth,

And at a sling’s throw found another shade

Far fiercer and more huge. I cannot say

What master hand had girt him; but he held

Behind the right arm fetter’d, and before

The other with a chain, that fasten’d him

From the neck down, and five times round his form

Apparent met the wreathed links. “This proud one

Would of his strength against almighty Jove

Make trial,” said my guide; “whence he is thus

Requited: Ephialtes him they call.
“Great was his prowess, when the giants brought

Fear on the gods: those arms, which then he piled,

Now moves he never.” Forthwith I return’d:

“Fain would I, if ’t were possible, mine eyes

Of Briareus immeasurable gain’d

Experience next.” He answer’d: “Thou shalt see

Not far from hence Antaeus, who both speaks

And is unfetter’d, who shall place us there

Where guilt is at its depth. Far onward stands

Whom thou wouldst fain behold, in chains, and made

Like to this spirit, save that in his looks

More fell he seems.” By violent earthquake rock’d

Ne’er shook a tow’r, so reeling to its base,

As Ephialtes. More than ever then

I dreaded death, nor than the terror more

Had needed, if I had not seen the cords

That held him fast. We, straightway journeying on,

Came to Antaeus, who five ells complete

Without the head, forth issued from the cave.

“O thou, who in the fortunate vale, that made

Great Scipio heir of glory, when his sword

Drove back the troop of Hannibal in flight,

Who thence of old didst carry for thy spoil

An hundred lions; and if thou hadst fought

In the high conflict on thy brethren’s side,

Seems as men yet believ’d, that through thine arm

The sons of earth had conquer’d, now vouchsafe

To place us down beneath, where numbing cold

Locks up Cocytus. Force not that we crave

Or Tityus’ help or Typhon’s. Here is one

Can give what in this realm ye covet. Stoop

Therefore, nor scornfully distort thy lip.

He in the upper world can yet bestow

Renown on thee, for he doth live, and looks

For life yet longer, if before the time

Grace call him not unto herself.” Thus spake

The teacher. He in haste forth stretch’d his hands,

And caught my guide. Alcides whilom felt

That grapple straighten’d score. Soon as my guide

Had felt it, he bespake me thus: “This way

That I may clasp thee;” then so caught me up,

That we were both one burden. As appears

The tower of Carisenda, from beneath

Where it doth lean, if chance a passing cloud

So sail across, that opposite it hangs,

Such then Antaeus seem’d, as at mine ease

I mark’d him stooping. I were fain at times

T’ have pass’d another way. Yet in th’ abyss,

That Lucifer with Judas low ingulfs,

lightly he plac’d us; nor there leaning stay’d,

But rose as in a bark the stately mast.

CANTO XXXII

Could I command rough rhimes and hoarse, to suit

That hole of sorrow, o’er which ev’ry rock

His firm abutment rears, then might the vein

Of fancy rise full springing: but not mine

Such measures, and with falt’ring awe I touch

The mighty theme; for to describe the depth

Of all the universe, is no emprize

To jest with, and demands a tongue not us’d

To infant babbling. But let them assist

My song, the tuneful maidens, by whose aid

Amphion wall’d in Thebes, so with the truth

My speech shall best accord. Oh ill-starr’d folk,

Beyond all others wretched! who abide

In such a mansion, as scarce thought finds words

To speak of, better had ye here on earth

Been flocks or mountain goats. As down we stood

In the dark pit beneath the giants’ feet,

But lower far than they, and I did gaze

Still on the lofty battlement, a voice

Bespoke me thus: “Look how thou walkest. Take

Good heed, thy soles do tread not on the heads

Of thy poor brethren.” Thereupon I turn’d,

And saw before and underneath my feet

A lake, whose frozen surface liker seem’d

To glass than water. Not so thick a veil

In winter e’er hath Austrian Danube spread

O’er his still course, nor Tanais far remote

Under the chilling sky. Roll’d o’er that mass

Had Tabernich or Pietrapana fall’n,
Not e’en its rim had creak’d. As peeps the frog

Croaking above the wave, what time in dreams

The village gleaner oft pursues her toil,

So, to where modest shame appears, thus low

Blue pinch’d and shrin’d in ice the spirits stood,

Moving their teeth in shrill note like the stork.

His face each downward held; their mouth the cold,

Their eyes express’d the dolour of their heart.

A space I look’d around, then at my feet

Saw two so strictly join’d, that of their head

The very hairs were mingled. “Tell me ye,

Whose bosoms thus together press,” said I,

“Who are ye?” At that sound their necks they bent,

And when their looks were lifted up to me,

Straightway their eyes, before all moist within,

Distill’d upon their lips, and the frost bound

The tears betwixt those orbs and held them there.

Plank unto plank hath never cramp clos’d up

So stoutly. Whence like two enraged goats

They clash’d together; them such fury seiz’d.

And one, from whom the cold both ears had reft,

Exclaim’d, still looking downward: “Why on us

Dost speculate so long? If thou wouldst know

Who are these two, the valley, whence his wave

Bisenzio slopes, did for its master own

Their sire Alberto, and next him themselves.

They from one body issued; and throughout

Caina thou mayst search, nor find a shade

More worthy in congealment to be fix’d,

Not him, whose breast and shadow Arthur’s land

At that one blow dissever’d, not Focaccia,

No not this spirit, whose o’erjutting head

Obstructs my onward view: he bore the name

Of Mascheroni: Tuscan if thou be,

Well knowest who he was: and to cut short

All further question, in my form behold

What once was Camiccione. I await

Carlino here my kinsman, whose deep guilt

Shall wash out mine.” A thousand visages

Then mark’d I, which the keen and eager cold

Had shap’d into a doggish grin; whence creeps

A shiv’ring horror o’er me, at the thought

Of those frore shallows. While we journey’d on

Toward the middle, at whose point unites

All heavy substance, and I trembling went

Through that eternal chillness, I know not

If will it were or destiny, or chance,

But, passing ’midst the heads, my foot did strike

With violent blow against the face of one.

“Wherefore dost bruise me?” weeping, he exclaim’d,

“Unless thy errand be some fresh revenge

For Montaperto, wherefore troublest me?”

I thus: “Instructor, now await me here,

That I through him may rid me of my doubt.

Thenceforth what haste thou wilt.” The teacher paus’d,

And to that shade I spake, who bitterly

Still curs’d me in his wrath. “What art thou, speak,

That railest thus on others?” He replied:

“Now who art thou, that smiting others’ cheeks

Through Antenora roamest, with such force

As were past suff’rance, wert thou living still?”

“And I am living, to thy joy perchance,”

Was my reply, “if fame be dear to thee,

That with the rest I may thy name enrol.”

“The contrary of what I covet most,”

Said he, “thou tender’st: hence; nor vex me more.

Ill knowest thou to flatter in this vale.”
Then seizing on his hinder scalp, I cried:

“Name thee, or not a hair shall tarry here.”

“Rend all away,” he answer’d, “yet for that

I will not tell nor show thee who I am,

Though at my head thou pluck a thousand times.”

Now I had grasp’d his tresses, and stript off

More than one tuft, he barking, with his eyes

Drawn in and downward, when another cried,

“What ails thee, Bocca? Sound not loud enough

Thy chatt’ring teeth, but thou must bark outright?

“What devil wrings thee?”—“Now,” said I, “be dumb,

Accursed traitor! to thy shame of thee

True tidings will I bear.”—“Off,” he replied,

“Tell what thou list; but as thou escape from hence

To speak of him whose tongue hath been so glib,

Forget not: here he wails the Frenchman’s gold.

‘Him of Duera,’ thou canst say, ‘I mark’d,

Where the starv’d sinners pine.’ If thou be ask’d

What other shade was with them, at thy side

Is Beccaria, whose red gorge distain’d

The biting axe of Florence. Farther on,

If I misdeem not, Soldanieri bides,

With Ganellon, and Tribaldello, him

Who op’d Faenza when the people slept.”

We now had left him, passing on our way,

When I beheld two spirits by the ice

Pent in one hollow, that the head of one

Was cowl unto the other; and as bread

Is raven’d up through hunger, th’ uppermost

Did so apply his fangs to th’ other’s brain,

Where the spine joins it. Not more furiously

On Menalippus’ temples Tydeus gnaw’d,

Than on that skull and on its garbage he.
“O thou who show’st so beastly sign of hate

’Gainst him thou prey’st on, let me hear,” said I

“The cause, on such condition, that if right

Warrant thy grievance, knowing who ye are,

And what the colour of his sinning was,

I may repay thee in the world above,

If that wherewith I speak be moist so long.”

CANTO XXXIII

His jaws uplifting from their fell repast,

That sinner wip’d them on the hairs o’ th’ head,

Which he behind had mangled, then began:

“Thy will obeying, I call up afresh

Sorrow past cure, which but to think of wrings

My heart, or ere I tell on’t. But if words,

That I may utter, shall prove seed to bear

Fruit of eternal infamy to him,

The traitor whom I gnaw at, thou at once

Shalt see me speak and weep. Who thou mayst be

I know not, nor how here below art come:

But Florentine thou seemest of a truth,

When I do hear thee. Know I was on earth

Count Ugolino, and th’ Archbishop he

Ruggieri. Why I neighbour him so close,

Now list. That through effect of his ill thoughts

In him my trust reposing, I was ta’en

And after murder’d, need is not I tell.

What therefore thou canst not have heard, that is,

How cruel was the murder, shalt thou hear,

And know if he have wrong’d me. A small grate

Within that mew, which for my sake the name

Of famine bears, where others yet must pine,

Already through its opening sev’ral moons

Had shown me, when I slept the evil sleep,

That from the future tore the curtain off.

This one, methought, as master of the sport,

Rode forth to chase the gaunt wolf and his whelps

Unto the mountain, which forbids the sight

Of Lucca to the Pisan. With lean brachs

Inquisitive and keen, before him rang’d

Lanfranchi with Sismondi and Gualandi.

After short course the father and the sons

Seem’d tir’d and lagging, and methought I saw

The sharp tusks gore their sides. When I awoke

Before the dawn, amid their sleep I heard

My sons (for they were with me) weep and ask

For bread. Right cruel art thou, if no pang

Thou feel at thinking what my heart foretold;

And if not now, why use thy tears to flow?

Now had they waken’d; and the hour drew near

When they were wont to bring us food; the mind

Of each misgave him through his dream, and I

Heard, at its outlet underneath lock’d up

The horrible tower: whence uttering not a word

I look’d upon the visage of my sons.

I wept not: so all stone I felt within.

They wept: and one, my little Anslem, cried:

‘Thou lookest so! Father what ails thee?’ Yet

I shed no tear, nor answer’d all that day

Nor the next night, until another sun

Came out upon the world. When a faint beam

Had to our doleful prison made its way,

And in four countenances I descry’d

The image of my own, on either hand

Through agony I bit, and they who thought

I did it through desire of feeding, rose

O’ th’ sudden, and cried, ‘Father, we should grieve

Far less, if thou wouldst eat of us: thou gav’st

These weeds of miserable flesh we wear,
And do thou strip them off from us again.’

Then, not to make them sadder, I kept down

My spirit in stillness. That day and the next

We all were silent. Ah, obdurate earth!

Why open’dst not upon us? When we came

To the fourth day, then Geddo at my feet

Outstretch’d did fling him, crying, ‘Hast no help

For me, my father!’ There he died, and e’en

Plainly as thou seest me, saw I the three

Fall one by one ’twixt the fifth day and sixth:
Whence I betook me now grown blind to grope

Over them all, and for three days aloud

Call’d on them who were dead. Then fasting got

The mastery of grief.” Thus having spoke,
Once more upon the wretched skull his teeth

He fasten’d, like a mastiff’s ’gainst the bone

Firm and unyielding. Oh thou Pisa! shame

Of all the people, who their dwelling make

In that fair region, where th’ Italian voice

Is heard, since that thy neighbours are so slack

To punish, from their deep foundations rise

Capraia and Gorgona, and dam up

The mouth of Arno, that each soul in thee

May perish in the waters! What if fame

Reported that thy castles were betray’d

By Ugolino, yet no right hadst thou

To stretch his children on the rack. For them,

Brigata, Ugaccione, and the pair

Of gentle ones, of whom my song hath told,

Their tender years, thou modern Thebes! did make

Uncapable of guilt. Onward we pass’d,

Where others skarf’d in rugged folds of ice

Not on their feet were turn’d, but each revers’d.

There very weeping suffers not to weep;

For at their eyes grief seeking passage finds

Impediment, and rolling inward turns

For increase of sharp anguish: the first tears

Hang cluster’d, and like crystal vizors show,

Under the socket brimming all the cup.

Now though the cold had from my face dislodg’d

Each feeling, as ’t were callous, yet me seem’d

Some breath of wind I felt. “Whence cometh this,”

Said I, “my master? Is not here below

All vapour quench’d?”—“‘Thou shalt be speedily,”

He answer’d, “where thine eye shall tell thee whence

The cause descrying of this airy shower.”

Then cried out one in the chill crust who mourn’d:

“O souls so cruel! that the farthest post

Hath been assign’d you, from this face remove

The harden’d veil, that I may vent the grief

Impregnate at my heart, some little space

Ere it congeal again!” I thus replied:

“Say who thou wast, if thou wouldst have mine aid;

And if I extricate thee not, far down

As to the lowest ice may I descend!”

“The friar Alberigo,” answered he,

“Am I, who from the evil garden pluck’d

Its fruitage, and am here repaid, the date

More luscious for my fig.”—“Hah!” I exclaim’d,

“Art thou too dead!”—“How in the world aloft

It fareth with my body,” answer’d he,

“I am right ignorant. Such privilege

Hath Ptolomea, that ofttimes the soul

Drops hither, ere by Atropos divorc’d.

And that thou mayst wipe out more willingly

The glazed tear-drops that o’erlay mine eyes,

Know that the soul, that moment she betrays,

As I did, yields her body to a fiend

Who after moves and governs it at will,

Till all its time be rounded; headlong she

Falls to this cistern. And perchance above

Doth yet appear the body of a ghost,

Who here behind me winters. Him thou know’st,

If thou but newly art arriv’d below.

The years are many that have pass’d away,

Since to this fastness Branca Doria came.”

“Now,” answer’d I, “methinks thou mockest me,

For Branca Doria never yet hath died,

But doth all natural functions of a man,

Eats, drinks, and sleeps, and putteth raiment on.”

He thus: “Not yet unto that upper foss

By th’ evil talons guarded, where the pitch

Tenacious boils, had Michael Zanche reach’d,

When this one left a demon in his stead

In his own body, and of one his kin,

Who with him treachery wrought. But now put forth

Thy hand, and ope mine eyes.” I op’d them not.

Ill manners were best courtesy to him.

Ah Genoese! men perverse in every way,

With every foulness stain’d, why from the earth

Are ye not cancel’d? Such an one of yours

I with Romagna’s darkest spirit found,

As for his doings even now in soul

Is in Cocytus plung’d, and yet doth seem

In body still alive upon the earth.

CANTO XXXIV

“The banners of Hell’s Monarch do come forth

Towards us; therefore look,” so spake my guide,

“If thou discern him.” As, when breathes a cloud

Heavy and dense, or when the shades of night

Fall on our hemisphere, seems view’d from far

A windmill, which the blast stirs briskly round,

Such was the fabric then methought I saw,

To shield me from the wind, forthwith I drew

Behind my guide: no covert else was there.

Now came I (and with fear I bid my strain

Record the marvel) where the souls were all

Whelm’d underneath, transparent, as through glass

Pellucid the frail stem. Some prone were laid,

Others stood upright, this upon the soles,

That on his head, a third with face to feet

Arch’d like a bow. When to the point we came,

Whereat my guide was pleas’d that I should see

The creature eminent in beauty once,

He from before me stepp’d and made me pause.
“Lo!” he exclaim’d, “lo Dis! and lo the place,

Where thou hast need to arm thy heart with strength.”

How frozen and how faint I then became,

Ask me not, reader! for I write it not,

Since words would fail to tell thee of my state.

I was not dead nor living. Think thyself

If quick conception work in thee at all,

How I did feel. That emperor, who sways

The realm of sorrow, at mid breast from th’ ice

Stood forth; and I in stature am more like

A giant, than the giants are in his arms.

Mark now how great that whole must be, which suits

With such a part. If he were beautiful

As he is hideous now, and yet did dare

To scowl upon his Maker, well from him

May all our mis’ry flow. Oh what a sight!

How passing strange it seem’d, when I did spy

Upon his head three faces: one in front

Of hue vermilion, th’ other two with this

Midway each shoulder join’d and at the crest;

The right ’twixt wan and yellow seem’d: the left

To look on, such as come from whence old Nile

Stoops to the lowlands. Under each shot forth

Two mighty wings, enormous as became

A bird so vast. Sails never such I saw

Outstretch’d on the wide sea. No plumes had they,

But were in texture like a bat, and these

He flapp’d i’ th’ air, that from him issued still

Three winds, wherewith Cocytus to its depth

Was frozen. At six eyes he wept: the tears

Adown three chins distill’d with bloody foam.

At every mouth his teeth a sinner champ’d

Bruis’d as with pond’rous engine, so that three

Were in this guise tormented. But far more

Than from that gnawing, was the foremost pang’d

By the fierce rending, whence ofttimes the back

Was stript of all its skin. “That upper spirit,

Who hath worse punishment,” so spake my guide,

“Is Judas, he that hath his head within

And plies the feet without. Of th’ other two,

Whose heads are under, from the murky jaw

Who hangs, is Brutus: lo! how he doth writhe

And speaks not! Th’ other Cassius, that appears

So large of limb. But night now re-ascends,

And it is time for parting. All is seen.”

I clipp’d him round the neck, for so he bade;

And noting time and place, he, when the wings

Enough were op’d, caught fast the shaggy sides,

And down from pile to pile descending stepp’d

Between the thick fell and the jagged ice.

Soon as he reach’d the point, whereat the thigh

Upon the swelling of the haunches turns,

My leader there with pain and struggling hard

Turn’d round his head, where his feet stood before,

And grappled at the fell, as one who mounts,

That into hell methought we turn’d again.

“Expect that by such stairs as these,” thus spake

The teacher, panting like a man forespent,

“We must depart from evil so extreme.”

Then at a rocky opening issued forth,

And plac’d me on a brink to sit, next join’d

With wary step my side. I rais’d mine eyes,

Believing that I Lucifer should see

Where he was lately left, but saw him now

With legs held upward. Let the grosser sort,

Who see not what the point was I had pass’d,

Bethink them if sore toil oppress’d me then.

“Arise,” my master cried, “upon thy feet.

The way is long, and much uncouth the road;

And now within one hour and half of noon

The sun returns.” It was no palace-hall

Lofty and luminous wherein we stood,

But natural dungeon where ill footing was

And scant supply of light. “Ere from th’ abyss

I sep’rate,” thus when risen I began,

“My guide! vouchsafe few words to set me free

From error’s thralldom. Where is now the ice?

How standeth he in posture thus revers’d?

And how from eve to morn in space so brief

Hath the sun made his transit?” He in few

Thus answering spake: “Thou deemest thou art still

On th’ other side the centre, where I grasp’d

Th’ abhorred worm, that boreth through the world.

Thou wast on th’ other side, so long as I

Descended; when I turn’d, thou didst o’erpass

That point, to which from ev’ry part is dragg’d

All heavy substance. Thou art now arriv’d

Under the hemisphere opposed to that,

Which the great continent doth overspread,

And underneath whose canopy expir’d

The Man, that was born sinless, and so liv’d.

Thy feet are planted on the smallest sphere,

Whose other aspect is Judecca. Morn

Here rises, when there evening sets: and he,

Whose shaggy pile was scal’d, yet standeth fix’d,

As at the first. On this part he fell down

From heav’n; and th’ earth, here prominent before,

Through fear of him did veil her with the sea,

And to our hemisphere retir’d. Perchance

To shun him was the vacant space left here

By what of firm land on this side appears,

That sprang aloof.” There is a place beneath,

From Belzebub as distant, as extends

The vaulted tomb, discover’d not by sight,

But by the sound of brooklet, that descends

This way along the hollow of a rock,

Which, as it winds with no precipitous course,

The wave hath eaten. By that hidden way

My guide and I did enter, to return

To the fair world: and heedless of repose

We climbed, he first, I following his steps,

Till on our view the beautiful lights of heav’n

Dawn’d through a circular opening in the cave:

Thus issuing we again beheld the stars.

PURGATORY

CANTO I

O’er better waves to speed her rapid course

The light bark of my genius lifts the sail,

Well pleas’d to leave so cruel sea behind;

And of that second region will I sing,

In which the human spirit from sinful blot

Is purg’d, and for ascent to Heaven prepares.

Here, O ye hallow’d Nine! for in your train

I follow, here the deadened strain revive;

Nor let Calliope refuse to sound

A somewhat higher song, of that loud tone,

Which when the wretched birds of chattering note

Had heard, they of forgiveness lost all hope.

Sweet hue of eastern sapphire, that was spread

O’er the serene aspect of the pure air,

High up as the first circle, to mine eyes

Unwonted joy renew’d, soon as I ’scap’d

Forth from the atmosphere of deadly gloom,

That had mine eyes and bosom fill’d with grief.

The radiant planet, that to love invites,

Made all the orient laugh, and veil’d beneath

The Pisces’ light, that in his escort came.
To the right hand I turn’d, and fix’d my mind

On the’ other pole attentive, where I saw

Four stars ne’er seen before save by the ken

Of our first parents. Heaven of their rays

Seem’d joyous. O thou northern site, bereft

Indeed, and widow’d, since of these depriv’d!

As from this view I had desisted, straight

Turning a little tow’rds the other pole,

There from whence now the wain had disappear’d,

I saw an old man standing by my side

Alone, so worthy of rev’rence in his look,

That ne’er from son to father more was ow’d.

Low down his beard and mix’d with hoary white

Descended, like his locks, which parting fell

Upon his breast in double fold. The beams

Of those four luminaries on his face

So brightly shone, and with such radiance clear

Deck’d it, that I beheld him as the sun.

“Say who are ye, that stemming the blind stream,

Forth from th’ eternal prison-house have fled?”

He spoke and moved those venerable plumes.

“Who hath conducted, or with lantern sure

Lights you emerging from the depth of night,

That makes the infernal valley ever black?

Are the firm statutes of the dread abyss

Broken, or in high heaven new laws ordain’d,

That thus, condemn’d, ye to my caves approach?”
My guide, then laying hold on me, by words

And intimations given with hand and head,

Made my bent knees and eye submissive pay

Due reverence; then thus to him replied.

“Not of myself I come; a Dame from heaven

Descending, had besought me in my charge

To bring. But since thy will implies, that more

Our true condition I unfold at large,

Mine is not to deny thee thy request.

This mortal ne’er hath seen the farthest gloom.

But erring by his folly had approach’d

So near, that little space was left to turn.

Then, as before I told, I was dispatch’d

To work his rescue, and no way remain’d

Save this which I have ta’en. I have display’d

Before him all the regions of the bad;

And purpose now those spirits to display,

That under thy command are purg’d from sin.

How I have brought him would be long to say.

From high descends the virtue, by whose aid

I to thy sight and hearing him have led.

Now may our coming please thee. In the search

Of liberty he journeys: that how dear

They know, who for her sake have life refus’d.

Thou knowest, to whom death for her was sweet

In Utica, where thou didst leave those weeds,

That in the last great day will shine so bright.

For us the’ eternal edicts are unmov’d:

He breathes, and I am free of Minos’ power,

Abiding in that circle where the eyes

Of thy chaste Marcia beam, who still in look

Prays thee, O hallow’d spirit! to own her shine.

Then by her love we’ implore thee, let us pass

Through thy sev’n regions; for which best thanks

I for thy favour will to her return,

If mention there below thou not disdain.”

“Marcia so pleasing in my sight was found,”

He then to him rejoin’d, “while I was there,

That all she ask’d me I was fain to grant.

Now that beyond the’ accursed stream she dwells,

She may no longer move me, by that law,

Which was ordain’d me, when I issued thence.

Not so, if Dame from heaven, as thou sayst,

Moves and directs thee; then no flattery needs.

Enough for me that in her name thou ask.

Go therefore now: and with a slender reed

See that thou duly gird him, and his face

Lave, till all sordid stain thou wipe from thence.

For not with eye, by any cloud obscur’d,

Would it be seemly before him to come,

Who stands the foremost minister in heaven.

This islet all around, there far beneath,

Where the wave beats it, on the oozy bed

Produces store of reeds. No other plant,

Cover’d with leaves, or harden’d in its stalk,

There lives, not bending to the water’s sway.

After, this way return not; but the sun

Will show you, that now rises, where to take

The mountain in its easiest ascent.”

He disappear’d; and I myself uprais’d

Speechless, and to my guide retiring close,

Toward him turn’d mine eyes. He thus began;

“My son! observant thou my steps pursue.

We must retreat to rearward, for that way

The champain to its low extreme declines.”

The dawn had chas’d the matin hour of prime,

Which deaf before it, so that from afar

I spy’d the trembling of the ocean stream.

We travers’d the deserted plain, as one

Who, wander’d from his track, thinks every step

Trodden in vain till he regain the path.

When we had come, where yet the tender dew

Strove with the sun, and in a place, where fresh

The wind breath’d o’er it, while it slowly dried;

Both hands extended on the watery grass

My master plac’d, in graceful act and kind.

Whence I of his intent before appriz’d,

Stretch’d out to him my cheeks suffus’d with tears.

There to my visage he anew restor’d

That hue, which the dun shades of hell conceal’d.

Then on the solitary shore arriv’d,

That never sailing on its waters saw

Man, that could after measure back his course,

He girt me in such manner as had pleas’d

Him who instructed, and O, strange to tell!

As he selected every humble plant,

Wherever one was pluck’d, another there

Resembling, straightway in its place arose.

CANTO II

Now had the sun to that horizon reach’d,

That covers, with the most exalted point

Of its meridian circle, Salem’s walls,

And night, that opposite to him her orb

Sounds, from the stream of Ganges issued forth,

Holding the scales, that from her hands are dropp’d

When she reigns highest: so that where I was,

Aurora’s white and vermeil-tinctur’d cheek

To orange turn’d as she in age increas’d.

Meanwhile we linger’d by the water’s brink,

Like men, who, musing on their road, in thought

Journey, while motionless the body rests.

When lo! as near upon the hour of dawn,

Through the thick vapours Mars with fiery beam

Glares down in west, over the ocean floor;

So seem’d, what once again I hope to view,

A light so swiftly coming through the sea,

No winged course might equal its career.

From which when for a space I had withdrawn

Thine eyes, to make inquiry of my guide,

Again I look’d and saw it grown in size

And brightness: thou on either side appear’d

Something, but what I knew not of bright hue,

And by degrees from underneath it came

Another. My preceptor silent yet

Stood, while the brightness, that we first discern’d,

Open’d the form of wings: then when he knew

The pilot, cried aloud, “Down, down; bend low

Thy knees; behold God’s angel: fold thy hands:

Now shalt thou see true Ministers indeed.”
Lo how all human means he sets at naught!

So that nor oar he needs, nor other sail

Except his wings, between such distant shores.

Lo how straight up to heaven he holds them rear’d,

Winnowing the air with those eternal plumes,

That not like mortal hairs fall off or change!”

As more and more toward us came, more bright

Appear’d the bird of God, nor could the eye

Endure his splendor near: I mine bent down.

He drove ashore in a small bark so swift

And light, that in its course no wave it drank.

The heav’nly steersman at the prow was seen,

Visibly written blessed in his looks.
Within a hundred spirits and more there sat.

“In Exitu Israel de Aegypto;”

All with one voice together sang, with what

In the remainder of that hymn is writ.

Then soon as with the sign of holy cross

He bless’d them, they at once leap’d out on land,

The swiftly as he came return’d. The crew,

There left, appear’d astounded with the place,

Gazing around as one who sees new sights.

From every side the sun darted his beams,

And with his arrowy radiance from mid heav’n

Had chas’d the Capricorn, when that strange tribe

Lifting their eyes towards us: “If ye know,

Declare what path will Lead us to the mount.”

Them Virgil answer’d. “Ye suppose perchance

Us well acquainted with this place: but here,

We, as yourselves, are strangers. Not long erst

We came, before you but a little space,

By other road so rough and hard, that now

The’ ascent will seem to us as play.” The spirits,

Who from my breathing had perceiv’d I liv’d,

Grew pale with wonder. As the multitude

Flock round a herald, sent with olive branch,

To hear what news he brings, and in their haste

Tread one another down, e’en so at sight

Of me those happy spirits were fix’d, each one

Forgetful of its errand, to depart,

Where cleans’d from sin, it might be made all fair.

Then one I saw darting before the rest

With such fond ardour to embrace me, I

To do the like was mov’d. O shadows vain

Except in outward semblance! thrice my hands

I clasp’d behind it, they as oft return’d

Empty into my breast again. Surprise

I needs must think was painted in my looks,

For that the shadow smil’d and backward drew.

To follow it I hasten’d, but with voice

Of sweetness it enjoin’d me to desist.

Then who it was I knew, and pray’d of it,

To talk with me, it would a little pause.

It answered: “Thee as in my mortal frame

I lov’d, so loos’d forth it I love thee still,

And therefore pause; but why walkest thou here?”

“Not without purpose once more to return,

Thou find’st me, my Casella, where I am

Journeying this way;” I said, “but how of thee

Hath so much time been lost?” He answer’d straight:

“No outrage hath been done to me, if he

Who when and whom he chooses takes, me oft

This passage hath denied, since of just will

His will he makes. These three months past indeed,

He, whose chose to enter, with free leave

Hath taken; whence I wand’ring by the shore

Where Tyber’s wave grows salt, of him gain’d kind

Admittance, at that river’s mouth, tow’rd which

His wings are pointed, for there always throng

All such as not to Archeron descend.”

Then I: “If new laws have not quite destroy’d

Memory and use of that sweet song of love,

That while all my cares had power to ’swage;

Please thee with it a little to console

My spirit, that incumber’d with its frame,

Travelling so far, of pain is overcome.”

“Love that discourses in my thoughts.” He then

Began in such soft accents, that within

The sweetness thrills me yet. My gentle guide

And all who came with him, so well were pleas’d,

That seem’d naught else might in their thoughts have room.

Fast fix’d in mute attention to his notes

We stood, when lo! that old man venerable

Exclaiming, “How is this, ye tardy spirits?

What negligence detains you loit’ring here?

Run to the mountain to cast off those scales,

That from your eyes the sight of God conceal.”

As a wild flock of pigeons, to their food

Collected, blade or tares, without their pride

Accustom’d, and in still and quiet sort,

If aught alarm them, suddenly desert

Their meal, assail’d by more important care;

So I that new-come troop beheld, the song

Deserting, hasten to the mountain’s side,

As one who goes yet where he tends knows not.

Nor with less hurried step did we depart.

CANTO III

Them sudden flight had scatter’d over the plain,

Turn’d tow’rds the mountain, whither reason’s voice

Drives us; I to my faithful company

Adhering, left it not. For how of him

Depriv’d, might I have sped, or who beside

Would o’er the mountainous tract have led my steps

He with the bitter pang of self-remorse

Seem’d smitten. O clear conscience and upright

How doth a little fling wound thee sore!

Soon as his feet desisted (slack’ning pace),

From haste, that mars all decency of act,

My mind, that in itself before was wrapt,

Its thoughts expanded, as with joy restor’d:

And full against the steep ascent I set

My face, where highest to heav’n its top o’erflows.

The sun, that flar’d behind, with ruddy beam

Before my form was broken; for in me

His rays resistance met. I turn’d aside

With fear of being left, when I beheld

Only before myself the ground obscur’d.

When thus my solace, turning him around,

Bespake me kindly: “Why distrustest thou?

Believ’st not I am with thee, thy sure guide?

It now is evening there, where buried lies

The body, in which I cast a shade, remov’d

To Naples from Brundusium’s wall. Nor thou

Marvel, if before me no shadow fall,

More than that in the sky element

One ray obstructs not other. To endure

Torments of heat and cold extreme, like frames

That virtue hath dispos’d, which how it works

Wills not to us should be reveal’d. Insane

Who hopes, our reason may that space explore,

Which holds three persons in one substance knit.

Seek not the wherefore, race of human kind;

Could ye have seen the whole, no need had been

For Mary to bring forth. Moreover ye

Have seen such men desiring fruitlessly;

To whose desires repose would have been giv’n,

That now but serve them for eternal grief.

I speak of Plato, and the Stagyrite,

And others many more.” And then he bent

Downwards his forehead, and in troubled mood

Broke off his speech. Meanwhile we had arriv’d

Far as the mountain’s foot, and there the rock

Found of so steep ascent, that nimblest steps

To climb it had been vain. The most remote

Most wild untrodden path, in all the tract

’Twixt Lerice and Turbia were to this

A ladder easy’ and open of access.

“Who knows on which hand now the steep declines?”

My master said and paus’d, “so that he may

Ascend, who journeys without aid of wine?”

And while with looks directed to the ground

The meaning of the pathway he explor’d,

And I gaz’d upward round the stony height,

Of spirits, that toward us mov’d their steps,

Yet moving seem’d not, they so slow approach’d.
I thus my guide address’d: “Upraise thine eyes,

Lo that way some, of whom thou may’st obtain

Counsel, if of thyself thou find’st it not!”

Straightway he look’d, and with free speech replied:

“Let us tend thither: they but softly come.

And thou be firm in hope, my son belov’d.”

Now was that people distant far in space

A thousand paces behind ours, as much

As at a throw the nervous arm could fling,

When all drew backward on the messy crags

Of the steep bank, and firmly stood unmov’d

As one who walks in doubt might stand to look.

“O spirits perfect! O already chosen!”

Virgil to them began, “by that blest peace,

Which, as I deem, is for you all prepar’d,

Instruct us where the mountain low declines,

So that attempt to mount it be not vain.

For who knows most, him loss of time most grieves.”

As sheep, that step from forth their fold, by one,

Or pairs, or three at once; meanwhile the rest

Stand fearfully, bending the eye and nose

To ground, and what the foremost does, that do

The others, gath’ring round her, if she stops,

Simple and quiet, nor the cause discern;

So saw I moving to advance the first,

Who of that fortunate crew were at the head,

Of modest mien and graceful in their gait.

When they before me had beheld the light

From my right side fall broken on the ground,

So that the shadow reach’d the cave, they stopp’d

And somewhat back retir’d: the same did all,

Who follow’d, though unweeting of the cause.

“Unask’d of you, yet freely I confess,

This is a human body which ye see.

That the sun’s light is broken on the ground,

Marvel not: but believe, that not without

Virtue deriv’d from Heaven, we to climb

Over this wall aspire.” So them bespake

My master; and that virtuous tribe rejoin’d;

“Turn, and before you there the entrance lies,”

Making a signal to us with bent hands.

Then of them one began. “Whoe’er thou art,

Who journey’st thus this way, thy visage turn,

Think if me elsewhere thou hast ever seen.”

I tow’rds him turn’d, and with fix’d eye beheld.

Comely, and fair, and gentle of aspect,

He seem’d, but on one brow a gash was mark’d.

When humbly I disclaim’d to have beheld

Him ever: “Now behold!” he said, and show’d

High on his breast a wound: then smiling spake.

“I am Manfredi, grandson to the Queen

Costanza: whence I pray thee, when return’d,

To my fair daughter go, the parent glad

Of Aragonia and Sicilia’s pride;

And of the truth inform her, if of me

Aught else be told. When by two mortal blows

My frame was shatter’d, I betook myself

Weeping to him, who of free will forgives.

My sins were horrible; but so wide arms

Hath goodness infinite, that it receives

All who turn to it. Had this text divine

Been of Cosenza's shepherd better scann'd,

Who then by Clement on my hunt was set,

Yet at the bridge's head my bones had lain,

Near Benevento, by the heavy mole

Protected; but the rain now drenches them,

And the wind drives, out of the kingdom's bounds,

Far as the stream of Verde, where, with lights

Extinguish'd, he remov'd them from their bed.

Yet by their curse we are not so destroy'd,

But that the eternal love may turn, while hope

Retains her verdant blossoms. True it is,

That such one as in contumacy dies

Against the holy church, though he repent,

Must wander thirty-fold for all the time

In his presumption past; if such decree

Be not by prayers of good men shorter made

Look therefore if thou canst advance my bliss;

Revealing to my good Costanza, how

Thou hast beheld me, and beside the terms

Laid on me of that interdict; for here

By means of those below much profit comes.”

CANTO IV

When by sensations of delight or pain,

That any of our faculties hath seiz’d,

Entire the soul collects herself, it seems

She is intent upon that power alone,

And thus the error is disprov’d which holds

The soul not singly lighted in the breast.

And therefore when as aught is heard or seen,

That firmly keeps the soul toward it turn’d,

Time passes, and a man perceives it not.

For that, whereby he hearken, is one power,

Another that, which the whole spirit hash;

This is as it were bound, while that is free.

This found I true by proof, hearing that spirit

And wond’ring; for full fifty steps aloft

The sun had measur’d unobserv’d of me,

When we arriv’d where all with one accord

The spirits shouted, “Here is what ye ask.”

A larger aperture ofttimes is stopp’d

With forked stake of thorn by villager,

When the ripe grape imbrowns, than was the path,

By which my guide, and I behind him close,

Ascended solitary, when that troop

Departing left us. On Sanleo’s road

Who journeys, or to Noli low descends,

Or mounts Bismantua’s height, must use his feet;

But here a man had need to fly, I mean

With the swift wing and plumes of high desire,

Conducted by his aid, who gave me hope,

And with light furnish’d to direct my way.
We through the broken rock ascended, close

Pent on each side, while underneath the ground

Ask’d help of hands and feet. When we arriv’d

Near on the highest ridge of the steep bank,

Where the plain level open’d I exclaim’d,

“O master! say which way can we proceed?”

He answer’d, “Let no step of thine recede.

Behind me gain the mountain, till to us

Some practis’d guide appear.” That eminence

Was lofty that no eye might reach its point,

And the side proudly rising, more than line

From the mid quadrant to the centre drawn.

I wearied thus began: “Parent belov’d!

Turn, and behold how I remain alone,

If thou stay not.”—“My son!” He straight reply’d,

“Thus far put forth thy strength;” and to a track

Pointed, that, on this side projecting, round

Circles the hill. His words so spurr’d me on,

That I behind him clamb’ring, forc’d myself,

Till my feet press’d the circuit plain beneath.

There both together seated, turn’d we round

To eastward, whence was our ascent: and oft

Many beside have with delight look’d back.

First on the nether shores I turn’d my eyes,

Then rais’d them to the sun, and wond’ring mark’d

That from the left it smote us. Soon perceiv’d

That Poet sage now at the car of light

Amaz’d I stood, where ’twixt us and the north

Its course it enter’d. Whence he thus to me:

“Were Leda’s offspring now in company

Of that broad mirror, that high up and low

Imparts his light beneath, thou might’st behold

The ruddy zodiac nearer to the bears

Wheel, if its ancient course it not forsook.

How that may be if thou would’st think; within

Pond’ring, imagine Sion with this mount

Plac’d on the earth, so that to both be one

Horizon, and two hemispheres apart,

Where lies the path that Phaeton ill knew

To guide his erring chariot: thou wilt see

How of necessity by this on one

He passes, while by that on the’ other side,

If with clear view shine intellect attend.”

“Of truth, kind teacher!” I exclaim’d, “so clear

Aught saw I never, as I now discern

Where seem’d my ken to fail, that the mid orb

Of the supernal motion (which in terms

Of art is called the Equator, and remains

Ever between the sun and winter) for the cause

Thou hast assign’d, from hence toward the north

Departs, when those who in the Hebrew land

Inhabit, see it tow’rds the warmer part.

But if it please thee, I would gladly know,

How far we have to journey: for the hill

Mounts higher, than this sight of mine can mount.”

He thus to me: “Such is this steep ascent,

That it is ever difficult at first,

But, more a man proceeds, less evil grows.

When pleasant it shall seem to thee, so much

That upward going shall be easy to thee.

As in a vessel to go down the tide,

Then of this path thou wilt have reach’d the end.

There hope to rest thee from thy toil. No more

I answer, and thus far for certain know.”

As he his words had spoken, near to us

A voice there sounded: “Yet ye first perchance

May to repose you by constraint be led.”

At sound thereof each turn’d, and on the left

A huge stone we beheld, of which nor I

Nor he before was ware. Thither we drew,

find there were some, who in the shady place

Behind the rock were standing, as a man

Thru’ idleness might stand. Among them one,

Who seem’d to me much wearied, sat him down,

And with his arms did fold his knees about,

Holding his face between them downward bent.
“Sweet Sir!” I cry’d, “behold that man, who shows

Himself more idle, than if laziness

Were sister to him.” Straight he turn’d to us,

And, o’er the thigh lifting his face, observ’d,

Then in these accents spake: “Up then, proceed

Thou valiant one.” Straight who it was I knew;

Nor could the pain I felt (for want of breath

Still somewhat urg’d me) hinder my approach.

And when I came to him, he scarce his head

Uplifted, saying “Well hast thou discern’d,

How from the left the sun his chariot leads.”

His lazy acts and broken words my lips

To laughter somewhat mov’d; when I began:

“Belacqua, now for thee I grieve no more.

But tell, why thou art seated upright there?

Waitest thou escort to conduct thee hence?

Or blame I only shine accustom’d ways?”

Then he: “My brother, of what use to mount,

When to my suffering would not let me pass

The bird of God, who at the portal sits?

Behooves so long that heav’n first bear me round

Without its limits, as in life it bore,

Because I to the end repentant Sighs

Delay’d, if prayer do not aid me first,

That riseth up from heart which lives in grace.

What other kind avails, not heard in heaven?”

Before me now the Poet up the mount

Ascending, cried: “Haste thee, for see the sun

Has touch’d the point meridian, and the night

Now covers with her foot Marocco’s shore.”

CANTO V

Now had I left those spirits, and pursued

The steps of my Conductor, when beheld

Pointing the finger at me one exclaim’d:

“See how it seems as if the light not shone

From the left hand of him beneath, and he,

As living, seems to be led on.” Mine eyes

I at that sound reverting, saw them gaze

Through wonder first at me, and then at me

And the light broken underneath, by turns.

“Why are thy thoughts thus riveted?” my guide

Exclaim’d, “that thou hast slack’d thy pace? or how

Imports it thee, what thing is whisper’d here?

Come after me, and to their babblings leave

The crowd. Be as a tower, that, firmly set,

Shakes not its top for any blast that blows!

He, in whose bosom thought on thought shoots out,

Still of his aim is wide, in that the one

Sicklies and wastes to nought the other’s strength.”

What other could I answer save “I come?”

I said it, somewhat with that colour ting’d

Which ofttimes pardon meriteth for man.

Meanwhile traverse along the hill there came,

A little way before us, some who sang

The “Miserere” in responsive Strains.

When they perceiv’d that through my body I

Gave way not for the rays to pass, their song

Straight to a long and hoarse exclaim they chang’d;

And two of them, in guise of messengers,

Ran on to meet us, and inquiring ask’d:

“Of your condition we would gladly learn.”

To them my guide. “Ye may return, and bear

Tidings to them who sent you, that his frame

Is real flesh. If, as I deem, to view

His shade they paus’d, enough is answer’d them.

Him let them honour, they may prize him well.”

Ne’er saw I fiery vapours with such speed

Cut through the serene air at fall of night,

Nor August’s clouds athwart the setting sun,

That upward these did not in shorter space

Return; and, there arriving, with the rest

Wheel back on us, as with loose rein a troop.
“Many,” exclaim’d the bard, “are these, who throng

Around us: to petition thee they come.

Go therefore on, and listen as thou go’st.”

“O spirit! who go’st on to blessedness

With the same limbs, that clad thee at thy birth.”

Shouting they came, “a little rest thy step.

Look if thou any one amongst our tribe

Hast e’er beheld, that tidings of him there

Thou mayst report. Ah, wherefore go’st thou on?

Ah wherefore tarriest thou not? We all

By violence died, and to our latest hour

Were sinners, but then warn’d by light from heav’n,

So that, repenting and forgiving, we

Did issue out of life at peace with God,

Who with desire to see him fills our heart.”

Then I: “The visages of all I scan

Yet none of ye remember. But if aught,

That I can do, may please you, gentle spirits!

Speak; and I will perform it, by that peace,

Which on the steps of guide so excellent

Following from world to world intent I seek."

In answer he began: "None here distrusts

Thy kindness, though not promis'd with an oath;

So as the will fail not for want of power.

Whence I, who sole before the others speak,

Entreat thee, if thou ever see that land,

Which lies between Romagna and the realm

Of Charles, that of thy courtesy thou pray

Those who inhabit Fano, that for me

Their adorations duly be put up,

By which I may purge off my grievous sins.

From thence I came. But the deep passages,

Whence issued out the blood wherein I dwelt,

Upon my bosom in Antenor’s land

Were made, where to be more secure I thought.

The author of the deed was Este’s prince,

Who, more than right could warrant, with his wrath

Pursued me. Had I towards Mira fled,

When overta’en at Oriaco, still

Might I have breath’d. But to the marsh I sped,

And in the mire and rushes tangled there

Fell, and beheld my life-blood float the plain.”

Then said another: “Ah! so may the wish,

That takes thee o’er the mountain, be fulfill’d,

As thou shalt graciously give aid to mine.

Of Montefeltro I; Buonconte I:

Giovanna nor none else have care for me,

Sorrowing with these I therefore go.” I thus:

“From Campaldino’s field what force or chance

Drew thee, that ne’er thy sepulture was known?”

“Oh!” answer’d he, “at Casentino’s foot

A stream there courseth, nam’d Archiano, sprung

In Apennine above the Hermit’s seat.

E’en where its name is cancel’d, there came I,

Pierc’d in the heart, fleeing away on foot,

And bloodying the plain. Here sight and speech

Fail’d me, and finishing with Mary’s name

I fell, and tenantless my flesh remain’d.

I will report the truth; which thou again

Tell to the living. Me God’s angel took,

Whilst he of hell exclaim’d: “O thou from heav’n!

Say wherefore hast thou robb’d me? Thou of him

Th’ eternal portion bear’st with thee away

For one poor tear that he deprives me of.

But of the other, other rule I make.”

“Thou knowest how in the atmosphere collects

That vapour dank, returning into water,

Soon as it mounts where cold condenses it.

That evil will, which in his intellect

Still follows evil, came, and rais’d the wind

And smoky mist, by virtue of the power

Given by his nature. Thence the valley, soon

As day was spent, he cover’d o’er with cloud

From Pratomagno to the mountain range,

And stretch’d the sky above, so that the air

Impregnate chang’d to water. Fell the rain,

And to the fosses came all that the land

Contain’d not; and, as mightiest streams are wont,

To the great river with such headlong sweep

Rush’d, that nought stay’d its course. My stiffen’d frame

Laid at his mouth the fell Archiano found,

And dash’d it into Arno, from my breast

Loos’ning the cross, that of myself I made

When overcome with pain. He hurl’d me on,

Along the banks and bottom of his course;

Then in his muddy spoils encircling wrapt.”
“Ah! when thou to the world shalt be return’d,

And rested after thy long road," so spake

Next the third spirit; "then remember me.

I once was Pia. Sienna gave me life,

Maremma took it from me. That he knows,

Who me with jewell'd ring had first espous'd."

CANTO VI

When from their game of dice men separate,

He, who hath lost, remains in sadness fix'd,

Revolving in his mind, what luckless throws

He cast: but meanwhile all the company

Go with the other; one before him runs,

And one behind his mantle twitches, one

Fast by his side bids him remember him.

He stops not; and each one, to whom his hand

Is stretch’d, well knows he bids him stand aside;

And thus he from the press defends himself.

E’en such was I in that close-crowding throng;

And turning so my face around to all,

And promising, I ’scap’d from it with pains.

Here of Arezzo him I saw, who fell

By Ghino’s cruel arm; and him beside,

Who in his chase was swallow’d by the stream.

Here Frederic Novello, with his hand

Stretch’d forth, entreated; and of Pisa he,

Who put the good Marzuco to such proof

Of constancy. Count Orso I beheld;

And from its frame a soul dismiss’d for spite

And envy, as it said, but for no crime:

I speak of Peter de la Brosse; and here,

While she yet lives, that Lady of Brabant

Let her beware; lest for so false a deed

She herd with worse than these. When I was freed

From all those spirits, who pray’d for others’ prayers

To hasten on their state of blessedness;

Straight I began: “O thou, my luminary!

It seems expressly in thy text denied,

That heaven’s supreme decree can never bend

To supplication; yet with this design

Do these entreat. Can then their hope be vain,

Or is thy saying not to me reveal’d?”

He thus to me: “Both what I write is plain,

And these deceiv’d not in their hope, if well

Thy mind consider, that the sacred height

Of judgment doth not stoop, because love’s flame

In a short moment all fulfils, which he

Who sojourns here, in right should satisfy.

Besides, when I this point concluded thus,

By praying no defect could be supplied;

Because the pray’r had none access to God.

Yet in this deep suspicion rest thou not

Contented unless she assure thee so,

Who betwixt truth and mind infuses light.

I know not if thou take me right; I mean

Beatrice. Her thou shalt behold above,

Upon this mountain’s crown, fair seat of joy.”

Then I: “Sir! let us mend our speed; for now

I tire not as before; and lo! the hill

Stretches its shadow far.” He answer’d thus:

“Our progress with this day shall be as much

As we may now dispatch; but otherwise

Than thou supposest is the truth. For there

Thou canst not be, ere thou once more behold

Him back returning, who behind the steep

Is now so hidden, that as erst his beam

Thou dost not break. But lo! a spirit there

Stands solitary, and toward us looks:

It will instruct us in the speediest way.”

We soon approach’d it. O thou Lombard spirit!

How didst thou stand, in high abstracted mood,

Scarce moving with slow dignity thine eyes!

It spoke not aught, but let us onward pass,

Eyeing us as a lion on his watch.

But Virgil with entreaty mild advanc’d,

Requesting it to show the best ascent.

It answer to his question none return’d,

But of our country and our kind of life

Demanded. When my courteous guide began,

“Mantua,” the solitary shadow quick

Rose towards us from the place in which it stood,

And cry’d, “Mantuan! I am thy countryman

Sordello.” Each the other then embrac’d.

Ah slavish Italy! thou inn of grief,

Vessel without a pilot in loud storm,

Lady no longer of fair provinces,

But brothel-house impure! this gentle spirit,

Ev’n from the Pleasant sound of his dear land

Was prompt to greet a fellow citizen

With such glad cheer; while now thy living ones

In thee abide not without war; and one

Malicious gnaws another, ay of those

Whom the same wall and the same moat contains,

Seek, wretched one! around thy sea-coasts wide;

Then homeward to thy bosom turn, and mark

If any part of the sweet peace enjoy.

What boots it, that thy reins Justinian’s hand

Befitted, if thy saddle be unpress’d?

Nought doth he now but aggravate thy shame.

Ah people! thou obedient still shouldst live,

And in the saddle let thy Caesar sit,

If well thou marked’st that which God commands.

Look how that beast to felness hath relaps’d

From having lost correction of the spur,

Since to the bridle thou hast set thine hand,

O German Albert! who abandon’st her,

That is grown savage and unmanageable,

When thou should’st clasp her flanks with forked heels.

Just judgment from the stars fall on thy blood!

And be it strange and manifest to all!

Such as may strike thy successor with dread!

For that thy sire and thou have suffer’d thus,

Through greediness of yonder realms detain’d,

The garden of the empire to run waste.

Come see the Capulets and Montagues,

The Philippeschi and Monaldi! man

Who car’st for nought! those sunk in grief, and these

With dire suspicion rack’d. Come, cruel one!

Come and behold the’ oppression of the nobles,

And mark their injuries: and thou mayst see.

What safety Santafiore can supply.

Come and behold thy Rome, who calls on thee,

Desolate widow! day and night with moans:

“My Caesar, why dost thou desert my side?”

Come and behold what love among thy people:

And if no pity touches thee for us,

Come and blush for thine own report. For me,

If it be lawful, O Almighty Power,

Who wast in earth for our sakes crucified!

Are thy just eyes turn’d elsewhere? or is this

A preparation in the wond’rous depth

Of thy sage counsel made, for some good end,

Entirely from our reach of thought cut off?

So are the’ Italian cities all o’erthrong’d

With tyrants, and a great Marcellus made

Of every petty factious villager.

My Florence! thou mayst well remain unmov’d

At this digression, which affects not thee:

Thanks to thy people, who so wisely speed.

Many have justice in their heart, that long

Waiteth for counsel to direct the bow,

Or ere it dart unto its aim: but shine

Have it on their lip’s edge. Many refuse

To bear the common burdens: readier thine

Answer uneall’d, and cry, “Behold I stoop!”

Make thyself glad, for thou hast reason now,

Thou wealthy! thou at peace! thou wisdom-fraught!

Facts best witness if I speak the truth.

Athens and Lacedaemon, who of old

Enacted laws, for civil arts renown’d,

Made little progress in improving life

Tow’rds thee, who usest such nice subtlety,

That to the middle of November scarce

Reaches the thread thou in October weav’st.

How many times, within thy memory,

Customs, and laws, and coins, and offices

Have been by thee renew’d, and people chang’d!

If thou remember’st well and can’st see clear,

Thou wilt perceive thyself like a sick wretch,

Who finds no rest upon her down, but oft

Shifting her side, short respite seeks from pain.

CANTO VII

After their courteous greetings joyfully

Sev’n times exchang’d, Sordello backward drew

Exclaiming, “Who are ye?” “Before this mount

By spirits worthy of ascent to God

Was sought, my bones had by Octavius’ care

Been buried. I am Virgil, for no sin

Depriv’d of heav’n, except for lack of faith.”

So answer’d him in few my gentle guide.

As one, who aught before him suddenly

Beholding, whence his wonder riseth, cries

“It is yet is not,” wav’ring in belief;

Such he appear’d; then downward bent his eyes,

And drawing near with reverential step,

Caught him, where of mean estate might clasp

His lord. “Glory of Latium!” he exclaim’d,

“In whom our tongue its utmost power display’d!

Boast of my honor’d birth-place! what desert

Of mine, what favour rather undeserv’d,

Shows thee to me? If I to hear that voice

Am worthy, say if from below thou com’st

And from what cloister’s pale?”—“Through every orb

Of that sad region,” he reply’d, “thus far

Am I arriv’d, by heav’nly influence led

And with such aid I come. There is a place

There underneath, not made by torments sad,

But by dun shades alone; where mourning’s voice

Sounds not of anguish sharp, but breathes in sighs.”
There I with little innocents abide,

Who by death’s fangs were bitten, ere exempt

From human taint. There I with those abide,

Who the three holy virtues put not on,

But understood the rest, and without blame

Follow’d them all. But if thou know’st and canst,

Direct us, how we soonest may arrive,

Where Purgatory its true beginning takes.”

He answer’d thus: “We have no certain place

Assign’d us: upwards I may go or round,

Far as I can, I join thee for thy guide.

But thou beholdest now how day declines:

And upwards to proceed by night, our power

Excels: therefore it may be well to choose

A place of pleasant sojourn. To the right

Some spirits sit apart retir’d. If thou

Consentest, I to these will lead thy steps:

And thou wilt know them, not without delight.”

“How chances this?” was answer’d; “who so wish’d

To ascend by night, would he be thence debarr’d

By other, or through his own weakness fail?”

The good Sordello then, along the ground

Trailing his finger, spoke: “Only this line

Thou shalt not overpass, soon as the sun

Hath disappear’d; not that aught else impedes

Thy going upwards, save the shades of night.

These with the wont of power perplex the will.

With them thou haply mightst return beneath,

Or to and fro around the mountain’s side

Wander, while day is in the horizon shut.”

My master straight, as wond’ring at his speech,

Exclaim’d: “Then lead us quickly, where thou sayst,

That, while we stay, we may enjoy delight.”

A little space we were remov’d from thence,

When I perceiv’d the mountain hollow’d out.

Ev’n as large valleys hollow’d out on earth,

“That way,” the’ escorting spirit cried, “we go,

Where in a bosom the high bank recedes:

And thou await renewal of the day.”

Betwixt the steep and plain a crooked path

Led us traverse into the ridge’s side,

Where more than half the sloping edge expires.

Refulgent gold, and silver thrice refin’d,

And scarlet grain and ceruse, Indian wood

Of lucid dye serene, fresh emeralds

But newly broken, by the herbs and flowers

Plac’d in that fair recess, in color all

Had been surpass’d, as great surpasses less.

Nor nature only there lavish’d her hues,

But of the sweetness of a thousand smells

A rare and undistinguish’d fragrance made.
“Salve Regina,” on the grass and flowers

Here chanting I beheld those spirits sit

Who not beyond the valley could be seen.

“Before the west’ring sun sink to his bed,”

Began the Mantuan, who our steps had turn’d,

“’Mid those desires not that I lead ye on.

For from this eminence ye shall discern

Better the acts and visages of all,

Than in the nether vale among them mix’d.

He, who sits high above the rest, and seems

To have neglected that he should have done,

And to the others’ song moves not his lip,

The Emperor Rodolph call, who might have heal’d

The wounds whereof fair Italy hath died,

So that by others she revives but slowly,

He, who with kindly visage comforts him,

Sway’d in that country, where the water springs,

That Moldaw’s river to the Elbe, and Elbe

Rolls to the ocean: Ottocar his name:

Who in his swaddling clothes was of more worth

Than Winceslaus his son, a bearded man,

Pamper’d with rank luxuriousness and ease.

And that one with the nose depress, who close

In counsel seems with him of gentle look,

Flying expir’d, with’ring the lily’s flower.

Look there how he doth knock against his breast!

The other ye behold, who for his cheek

Makes of one hand a couch, with frequent sighs.

They are the father and the father-in-law

Of Gallia’s bane: his vicious life they know

And foul; thence comes the grief that rends them thus.

“He, so robust of limb, who measure keeps

In song, with him of feature prominent,

With ev’ry virtue bore his girdle brac’d.

And if that stripling who behinds him sits,

King after him had liv’d, his virtue then

From vessel to like vessel had been pour’d;

Which may not of the other heirs be said.

By James and Frederick his realms are held;

Neither the better heritage obtains.

Rarely into the branches of the tree

Doth human worth mount up; and so ordains

He who bestows it, that as his free gift

It may be call’d. To Charles my words apply

No less than to his brother in the song;

Which Pouille and Provence now with grief confess.

So much that plant degenerates from its seed,

As more than Beatrice and Margaret

Costanza still boasts of her valorous spouse.

“Behold the king of simple life and plain,

Harry of England, sitting there alone:

He through his branches better issue spreads.

“That one, who on the ground beneath the rest

Sits lowest, yet his gaze directs aloft,

Us William, that brave Marquis, for whose cause

The deed of Alexandria and his war

Makes Conferrat and Canavese weep.”

CANTO VIII

Now was the hour that wakens fond desire

In men at sea, and melts their thoughtful heart,

Who in the morn have bid sweet friends farewell,

And pilgrim newly on his road with love

Thrills, if he hear the vesper bell from far,

That seems to mourn for the expiring day:

When I, no longer taking heed to hear

Began, with wonder, from those spirits to mark

One risen from its seat, which with its hand

Audience implor’d. Both palms it join’d and rais’d,

Fixing its steadfast gaze towards the east,

As telling God, “I care for naught beside.”

“Te Lucis Ante,” so devoutly then

Came from its lip, and in so soft a strain,

That all my sense in ravishment was lost.

And the rest after, softly and devout,

Follow’d through all the hymn, with upward gaze

Directed to the bright supernal wheels.

Here, reader! for the truth makes thine eyes keen:

For of so subtle texture is this veil,

That thou with ease mayst pass it through unmark’d.

I saw that gentle band silently next

Look up, as if in expectation held,

Pale and in lowly guise; and from on high

I saw forth issuing descend beneath

Two angels with two flame-illumin’d swords,

Broken and mutilated at their points.

Green as the tender leaves but newly born,

Their vesture was, the which by wings as green

Beaten, they drew behind them, fann’d in air.

A little over us one took his stand,

The other lighted on the’ Opposing hill,

So that the troop were in the midst contain’d.

Well I descried the whiteness on their heads;

But in their visages the dazzled eye

Was lost, as faculty that by too much

Is overpower’d. “From Mary’s bosom both

Are come,” exclaim’d Sordello, “as a guard

Over the vale, ganst him, who hither tends,

The serpent.” Whence, not knowing by which path

He came, I turn’d me round, and closely press’d,

All frozen, to my leader’s trusted side.

Sordello paus’d not: “To the valley now

(For it is time) let us descend; and hold

Converse with those great shadows: haply much

Their sight may please ye.” Only three steps down

Methinks I measur’d, ere I was beneath,

And noted one who look’d as with desire

To know me. Time was now that air arrow dim;

Yet not so dim, that ’twixt his eyes and mine

It clear’d not up what was conceal’d before.

Mutually tow’rds each other we advanc’d.

Nino, thou courteous judge! what joy I felt,

When I perceiv’d thou wert not with the bad!

No salutation kind on either part

Was left unsaid. He then inquir’d: “How long

Since thou arrived’st at the mountain’s foot,

Over the distant waves?”—“O!” answer’d I,

“Through the sad seats of woe this morn I came,

And still in my first life, thus journeying on,

The other strive to gain.” Soon as they heard

My words, he and Sordello backward drew,

As suddenly amaz’d. To Virgil one,

The other to a spirit turn’d, who near

Was seated, crying: “Conrad! up with speed:

Come, see what of his grace high God hath will’d.”

Then turning round to me: “By that rare mark

Of honour which thou ow’st to him, who hides

So deeply his first cause, it hath no ford,

When thou shalt be beyond the vast of waves.

Tell my Giovanna, that for me she call

There, where reply to innocence is made.

Her mother, I believe, loves me no more;

Since she has chang’d the white and wimpled folds,

Which she is doom’d once more with grief to wish.

By her it easily may be perceiv’d,

How long in women lasts the flame of love,

If sight and touch do not relume it oft.

For her so fair a burial will not make

The viper which calls Milan to the field,

As had been made by shrill Gallura’s bird.”

He spoke, and in his visage took the stamp

Of that right seal, which with due temperature

Glows in the bosom. My insatiate eyes

Meanwhile to heav’n had travel’d, even there

Where the bright stars are slowest, as a wheel

Nearest the axle; when my guide inquir’d:

“What there aloft, my son, has caught thy gaze?”

I answer’d: “The three torches, with which here

The pole is all on fire.” He then to me:

“The four resplendent stars, thou saw’st this morn

Are there beneath, and these ris’n in their stead.”

While yet he spoke. Sordello to himself

Drew him, and cry’d: “Lo there our enemy!”

And with his hand pointed that way to look.

Along the side, where barrier none arose

Around the little vale, a serpent lay,

Such haply as gave Eve the bitter food.

Between the grass and flowers, the evil snake

Came on, reverting oft his lifted head;

And, as a beast that smoothes its polish’d coat,

Licking his hack. I saw not, nor can tell,

How those celestial falcons from their seat

Mov’d, but in motion each one well descried,

Hearing the air cut by their verdant plumes.

The serpent fled; and to their stations back

The angels up return’d with equal flight.
The Spirit (who to Nino, when he call’d,

Had come), from viewing me with fixed ken,

Through all that conflict, loosen’d not his sight.

“So may the lamp, which leads thee up on high,

Find, in thy destin’d lot, of wax so much,

As may suffice thee to the enamel’s height.”

It thus began: “If any certain news

Of Valdimagra and the neighbour part

Thou know’st, tell me, who once was mighty there

They call’d me Conrad Malaspina, not

That old one, but from him I sprang. The love

I bore my people is now here refin’d.”

“In your dominions,” I answer’d, “ne’er was I.

But through all Europe where do those men dwell,

To whom their glory is not manifest?

The fame, that honours your illustrious house,

Proclaims the nobles and proclaims the land;

So that he knows it who was never there.

I swear to you, so may my upward route

Prosper! your honour’d nation not impairs

The value of her coffer and her sword.

Nature and use give her such privilege,

That while the world is twisted from his course

By a bad head, she only walks aright,

And has the evil way in scorn.” He then:

“Now pass thee on: sev’n times the tired sun

Revisits not the couch, which with four feet

The forked Aries covers, ere that kind

Opinion shall be nail’d into thy brain

With stronger nails than other’s speech can drive,

If the sure course of judgment be not stay’d.”

CANTO IX

Now the fair consort of Tithonus old,

Arisen from her mate’s beloved arms,

Look’d palely o’er the eastern cliff: her brow,

Lucent with jewels, glitter’d, set in sign

Of that chill animal, who with his train

Smites fearful nations: and where then we were,

Two steps of her ascent the night had past,

And now the third was closing up its wing,

When I, who had so much of Adam with me,

Sank down upon the grass, o’ercome with sleep,

There where all five were seated. In that hour,

When near the dawn the swallow her sad lay,

Rememb’ring haply ancient grief, renews,

And with our minds more wand’rers from the flesh,

And less by thought restrain’d are, as ’t were, full

Of holy divination in their dreams,

Then in a vision did I seem to view

A golden-feather’d eagle in the sky,

With open wings, and hov’ring for descent,

And I was in that place, methought, from whence

Young Ganymede, from his associates ’reft,

Was snatch’d aloft to the high consistory.

“Perhaps,” thought I within me, “here alone

He strikes his quarry, and elsewhere disdains

To pounce upon the prey.” Therewith, it seem’d,

A little wheeling in his airy tour

Terrible as the lightning rush’d he down,

And snatch’d me upward even to the fire.
There both, I thought, the eagle and myself

Did burn; and so intense th’ imagin’d flames,

That needs my sleep was broken off. As erst

Achilles shook himself, and round him roll’d

His waken’d eyeballs wond’ring where he was,

Whenas his mother had from Chiron fled

To Scyros, with him sleeping in her arms;

E’en thus I shook me, soon as from my face

The slumber parted, turning deadly pale,

Like one ice-struck with dread. Solo at my side

My comfort stood: and the bright sun was now

More than two hours aloft: and to the sea

My looks were turn’d. “Fear not,” my master cried,

“Assur’d we are at happy point. Thy strength

Shrink not, but rise dilated. Thou art come

To Purgatory now. Lo! there the cliff

That circling bounds it! Lo! the entrance there,

Where it doth seem disparted! Ere the dawn

Usher’d the daylight, when thy wearied soul

Slept in thee, o’er the flowery vale beneath

A lady came, and thus bespake me: I

Am Lucia. Suffer me to take this man,

Who slumbers. Easier so his way shall speed.”

Sordello and the other gentle shapes

Tarrying, she bare thee up: and, as day shone,

This summit reach’d: and I pursued her steps.

Here did she place thee. First her lovely eyes

That open entrance show’d me; then at once

She vanish’d with thy sleep.” Like one, whose doubts

Are chas’d by certainty, and terror turn’d

To comfort on discovery of the truth,

Such was the change in me: and as my guide

Beheld me fearless, up along the cliff

He mov’d, and I behind him, towards the height.

Reader! thou markest how my theme doth rise,

Nor wonder therefore, if more artfully

I prop the structure! Nearer now we drew,

Arriv’d’ whence in that part, where first a breach

As of a wall appear’d, I could descry

A portal, and three steps beneath, that led

For inlet there, of different colour each,

And one who watch’d, but spake not yet a word.

As more and more mine eye did stretch its view,

I mark’d him seated on the highest step,

In visage such, as past my power to bear.
Grasp’d in his hand a naked sword, glanc’d back

The rays so toward me, that I oft in vain

My sight directed. “Speak from whence ye stand:”

He cried: “What would ye? Where is your escort?

Take heed your coming upward harm ye not.”

“A heavenly dame, not skilless of these things,”

Replied the’ instructor, “told us, even now,

‘Pass that way: here the gate is.”—“And may she

Befriending prosper your ascent,” resum’d

The courteous keeper of the gate: “Come then

Before our steps.” We straightway thither came.

The lowest stair was marble white so smooth

And polish’d, that therein my mirror’d form

Distinct I saw. The next of hue more dark

Than sablest grain, a rough and singed block,

Crack’d lengthwise and across. The third, that lay

Massy above, seem’d porphyry, that flam’d

Red as the life-blood spouting from a vein.

On this God’s angel either foot sustain’d,

Upon the threshold seated, which appear’d

A rock of diamond. Up the trinal steps

My leader cheerily drew me. “Ask,” said he,

“With humble heart, that he unbar the bolt.”

Piously at his holy feet devolv’d

I cast me, praying him for pity’s sake

That he would open to me: but first fell

Thrice on my bosom prostrate. Seven times

The letter, that denotes the inward stain,

He on my forehead with the blunted point

Of his drawn sword inscrib'd. And "Look," he cried,

"When enter'd, that thou wash these scars away."

Ashes, or earth ta'en dry out of the ground,

Were of one colour with the robe he wore.

From underneath that vestment forth he drew

Two keys of metal twain: the one was gold,

Its fellow silver. With the pallid first,

And next the burnish'd, he so ply'd the gate,

As to content me well. "Whenever one

Faileth of these, that in the keyhole straight

It turn not, to this alley then expect

Access in vain." Such were the words he spake.

“One is more precious: but the other needs

Skill and sagacity, large share of each,

Ere its good task to disengage the knot

Be worthily perform’d. From Peter these

I hold, of him instructed, that I err

Rather in opening than in keeping fast;

So but the suppliant at my feet implore.”

Then of that hallow’d gate he thrust the door,

Exclaiming, “Enter, but this warning hear:

He forth again departs who looks behind.”

As in the hinges of that sacred ward

The swivels turn’d, sonorous metal strong,

Harsh was the grating; nor so surlily

Roar’d the Tarpeian, when by force bereft

Of good Metellus, thenceforth from his loss

To leanness doom’d. Attentively I turn’d,

List’ning the thunder, that first issued forth;

And “We praise thee, O God,” methought I heard

In accents blended with sweet melody.

The strains came o’er mine ear, e’en as the sound

Of choral voices, that in solemn chant

With organ mingle, and, now high and clear,

Come swelling, now float indistinct away.

CANTO X

When we had passed the threshold of the gate

(Which the soul’s ill affection doth disuse,

Making the crooked seem the straighter path),

I heard its closing sound. Had mine eyes turn’d,

For that offence what plea might have avail’d?

We mounted up the riven rock, that wound

On either side alternate, as the wave

Flies and advances. “Here some little art

Behooves us,” said my leader, “that our steps

Observe the varying flexure of the path.”

Thus we so slowly sped, that with cleft orb

The moon once more o’erhangs her wat’ry couch,

Ere we that strait have threaded. But when free

We came and open, where the mount above

One solid mass retires, I spent, with toil,

And both, uncertain of the way, we stood,

Upon a plain more lonesome, than the roads

That traverse desert wilds. From whence the brink

Borders upon vacuity, to foot

Of the steep bank, that rises still, the space

Had measur’d thrice the stature of a man:

And, distant as mine eye could wing its flight,

To leftward now and now to right dispatch’d,

That cornice equal in extent appear’d.

Not yet our feet had on that summit mov’d,

When I discover’d that the bank around,

Whose proud uprising all ascent denied,

Was marble white, and so exactly wrought

With quaintest sculpture, that not there alone

Had Polycletus, but e’en nature’s self

Been sham’d. The angel who came down to earth

With tidings of the peace so many years

Wept for in vain, that op’d the heavenly gates

From their long interdict before us seem’d,

In a sweet act, so sculptur’d to the life,

He look’d no silent image. One had sworn

He had said, “Hail!” for she was imag’d there,

By whom the key did open to God’s love,

And in her act as sensibly impress

That word, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord,”

As figure seal’d on wax. “Fix not thy mind

On one place only,” said the guide belov’d,

Who had me near him on that part where lies

The heart of man. My sight forthwith I turn’d

And mark’d, behind the virgin mother’s form,

Upon that side, where he, that mov’d me, stood,

Another story graven on the rock.

I passed athwart the bard, and drew me near,

That it might stand more aptly for my view.

There in the self-same marble were engrav'd

The cart and kine, drawing the sacred ark,

That from unbidden office awes mankind.

Before it came much people; and the whole

Parted in seven quires. One sense cried, "Nay,"

Another, "Yes, they sing." Like doubt arose

Betwixt the eye and smell, from the curl'd fume

Of incense breathing up the well-wrought toil.

Preceding the blest vessel, onward came

With light dance leaping, girt in humble guise,

Sweet Israel's harper: in that hap he seem'd

Less and yet more than kingly. Opposite,

At a great palace, from the lattice forth

Look’d Michol, like a lady full of scorn

And sorrow. To behold the tablet next,

Which at the hack of Michol whitely shone,

I mov’d me. There was storied on the rock

The’ exalted glory of the Roman prince,

Whose mighty worth mov’d Gregory to earn

His mighty conquest, Trajan th’ Emperor.

A widow at his bridle stood, attir’d

In tears and mourning. Round about them troop’d

Full throng of knights, and overhead in gold

The eagles floated, struggling with the wind.
The wretch appear’d amid all these to say:

“Grant vengeance, sire! for, woe beshrew this heart

My son is murder’d.” He replying seem’d;

“Wait now till I return.” And she, as one

Made hasty by her grief; “O sire, if thou

Dost not return?”—“Where I am, who then is,

May right thee.”—“What to thee is other’s good,

If thou neglect thy own?”—“Now comfort thee,”

At length he answers. “It beseemeth well

My duty be perform’d, ere I move hence:

So justice wills; and pity bids me stay.”

He, whose ken nothing new surveys, produc’d

That visible speaking, new to us and strange

The like not found on earth. Fondly I gaz’d

Upon those patterns of meek humbleness,

Shapes yet more precious for their artist’s sake,

When “Lo,” the poet whisper’d, “where this way

(But slack their pace), a multitude advance.

These to the lofty steps shall guide us on.”

Mine eyes, though bent on view of novel sights

Their lov’d allurement, were not slow to turn.

Reader! I would not that amaz’d thou miss

Of thy good purpose, hearing how just God

Decrees our debts be cancel’d. Ponder not

The form of suff’ring. Think on what succeeds,

Think that at worst beyond the mighty doom

It cannot pass. “Instructor,” I began,

“What I see hither tending, bears no trace

Of human semblance, nor of aught beside

That my foil’d sight can guess.” He answering thus:

“So courb’d to earth, beneath their heavy teems

Of torment stoop they, that mine eye at first

Struggled as thine. But look intently thither,

An disentangle with thy lab’ring view,

What underneath those stones approacheth: now,

E’en now, mayst thou discern the pangs of each.”

Christians and proud! O poor and wretched ones!

That feeble in the mind’s eye, lean your trust

Upon unstaid perverseness! Know ye not

That we are worms, yet made at last to form

The winged insect, imp’d with angel plumes

That to heaven’s justice unobstructed soars?

Why buoy ye up aloft your unfleg’d souls?

Abortive then and shapeless ye remain,

Like the untimely embryon of a worm!

As, to support incumbent floor or roof,

For corbel is a figure sometimes seen,

That crumples up its knees unto its breast,

With the feign’d posture stirring ruth unfeign’d

In the beholder’s fancy; so I saw

These fashion’d, when I noted well their guise.

Each, as his back was laden, came indeed

Or more or less contract; but it appear’d

As he, who show’d most patience in his look,

Wailing exclaim’d: “I can endure no more.”

CANTO XI

“O thou Almighty Father, who dost make

The heavens thy dwelling, not in bounds confin’d,

But that with love intenser there thou view’st

Thy primal effluence, hallow’d be thy name:

Join each created being to extol

Thy might, for worthy humblest thanks and praise

Is thy blest Spirit. May thy kingdom’s peace

Come unto us; for we, unless it come,

With all our striving thither tend in vain.

As of their will the angels unto thee

Tender meet sacrifice, circling thy throne

With loud hosannas, so of theirs be done

By saintly men on earth. Grant us this day

Our daily manna, without which he roams

Through this rough desert retrograde, who most

Toils to advance his steps. As we to each

Pardon the evil done us, pardon thou

Benign, and of our merit take no count.

’Gainst the old adversary prove thou not

Our virtue easily subdu’d; but free

From his incitements and defeat his wiles.

This last petition, dearest Lord! is made

Not for ourselves, since that were needless now,

But for their sakes who after us remain.”

Thus for themselves and us good speed imploring,

Those spirits went beneath a weight like that

We sometimes feel in dreams, all, sore beset,

But with unequal anguish, wearied all,

Round the first circuit, purging as they go,

The world’s gross darkness off: In our behalf

If there vows still be offer’d, what can here

For them be vow’d and done by such, whose wills

Have root of goodness in them? Well beseems

That we should help them wash away the stains

They carried hence, that so made pure and light,

They may spring upward to the starry spheres.

“Ah! so may mercy-temper’d justice rid

Your burdens speedily, that ye have power

To stretch your wing, which e’en to your desire

Shall lift you, as ye show us on which hand

Toward the ladder leads the shortest way.

And if there be more passages than one,

Instruct us of that easiest to ascend;

For this man who comes with me, and bears yet

The charge of fleshly raiment Adam left him,

Despite his better will but slowly mounts.”

From whom the answer came unto these words,

Which my guide spake, appear’d not; but ’twas said.

“Along the bank to rightward come with us,

And ye shall find a pass that mocks not toil

Of living man to climb: and were it not

That I am hinder’d by the rock, wherewith

This arrogant neck is tam’d, whence needs I stoop

My visage to the ground, him, who yet lives,

Whose name thou speak’st not him I fain would view.

To mark if e’er I knew him? and to crave

His pity for the fardel that I bear.

I was of Latiun, of a Tuscan horn

A mighty one: Aldobranlesco’s name

My sire’s, I know not if ye e’er have heard.

My old blood and forefathers’ gallant deeds

Made me so haughty, that I clean forgot

The common mother, and to such excess,

Wax’d in my scorn of all men, that I fell,

Fell therefore; by what fate Sienna’s sons,

Each child in Campagnatico, can tell.

I am Omberto; not me only pride

Hath injur’d, but my kindred all involv’d

In mischief with her. Here my lot ordains

Under this weight to groan, till I appease

God’s angry justice, since I did it not

Amongst the living, here amongst the dead.”

List’ning I bent my visage down: and one

(Not he who spake) twisted beneath the weight

That urg’d him, saw me, knew me straight, and call’d,

Holding his eyes With difficulty fix’d

Intent upon me, stooping as I went

Companion of their way. “O!” I exclaim’d,

“Art thou not Oderigi, art not thou

Agobbio’s glory, glory of that art

Which they of Paris call the limmer’s skill?”

“Brother!” said he, “with tints that gayer smile,

Bolognian Franco’s pencil lines the leaves.

His all the honour now; mine borrow’d light.

In truth I had not been thus courteous to him,

The whilst I liv’d, through eagerness of zeal

For that pre-eminence my heart was bent on.

Here of such pride the forfeiture is paid.

Nor were I even here; if, able still

To sin, I had not turn’d me unto God.

O powers of man! how vain your glory, nipp’d

E’en in its height of verdure, if an age

Less bright succeed not! Cimabue thought

To lord it over painting’s field; and now

The cry is Giotto’s, and his name eclips’d.

Thus hath one Guido from the other snatch’d

The letter’d prize: and he perhaps is born,

Who shall drive either from their nest. The noise

Of worldly fame is but a blast of wind,

That blows from divers points, and shifts its name

Shifting the point it blows from. Shalt thou more

Live in the mouths of mankind, if thy flesh

Part shrivel’d from thee, than if thou hadst died,

Before the coral and the pap were left,

Or ere some thousand years have passed? and that

Is, to eternity compar’d, a space,

Briefer than is the twinkling of an eye

To the heaven’s slowest orb. He there who treads

So leisurely before me, far and wide

Through Tuscany resounded once; and now

Is in Sienna scarce with whispers nam’d:

There was he sov’reign, when destruction caught

The madd’ning rage of Florence, in that day

Proud as she now is loathsome. Your renown

Is as the herb, whose hue doth come and go,

And his might withers it, by whom it sprang

Crude from the lap of earth.” I thus to him:

“True are thy sayings: to my heart they breathe

The kindly spirit of meekness, and allay

What tumours rankle there. But who is he

Of whom thou spak’st but now?”—“This,” he replied,

“Is Provenzano. He is here, because

He reach’d, with grasp presumptuous, at the sway

Of all Sienna. Thus he still hath gone,

Thus goeth never-resting, since he died.

Such is th’ acquittance render’d back of him,

Who, beyond measure, dar’d on earth.” I then:

“If soul that to the verge of life delays

Repentance, linger in that lower space,

Nor hither mount, unless good prayers befriend,

How chanc’d admittance was vouchsaf’d to him?”

“When at his glory’s topmost height,” said he,

“Respect of dignity all cast aside,

Freely He fix’d him on Sienna’s plain,

A suitor to redeem his suff’ring friend,

Who languish’d in the prison-house of Charles,

Nor for his sake refus’d through every vein

To tremble. More I will not say; and dark,

I know, my words are, but thy neighbours soon

Shall help thee to a comment on the text.

This is the work, that from these limits freed him.”

CANTO XII

With equal pace as oxen in the yoke,

I with that laden spirit journey’d on

Long as the mild instructor suffer’d me;

But when he bade me quit him, and proceed

(For “here,” said he, “behooves with sail and oars

Each man, as best he may, push on his bark”),

Upright, as one dispos’d for speed, I rais’d

My body, still in thought submissive bow’d.

I now my leader’s track not loth pursued;

And each had shown how light we far’d along

When thus he warn’d me: “Bend thine eyesight down:

For thou to ease the way shall find it good

To ruminate the bed beneath thy feet.”

As in memorial of the buried, drawn

Upon earth-level tombs, the sculptur’d form

Of what was once, appears (at sight whereof

Tears often stream forth by remembrance wak’d,

Whose sacred stings the piteous only feel),

So saw I there, but with more curious skill

Of portraiture o’erwrought, whate’er of space

From forth the mountain stretches. On one part

Him I beheld, above all creatures erst

Created noblest, light’ning fall from heaven:

On th’ other side with bolt celestial pierc’d

Briareus: cumb’ring earth he lay through dint

Of mortal ice-stroke. The Thymbraean god

With Mars, I saw, and Pallas, round their sire,

Arm’d still, and gazing on the giant’s limbs

Strewn o’er th’ ethereal field. Nimrod I saw:

At foot of the stupendous work he stood,

As if bewilder’d, looking on the crowd

Leagued in his proud attempt on Sennaar’s plain.

O Niobe! in what a trance of woe

Thee I beheld, upon that highway drawn,

Sev’n sons on either side thee slain! O Saul!

How ghastly didst thou look! on thine own sword

Expiring in Gilboa, from that hour

Ne’er visited with rain from heav’n or dew!
O fond Arachne! thee I also saw

Half spider now in anguish crawling up

Th’ unfinish’d web thou weaved’st to thy bane!

O Rehoboam! here thy shape doth seem

Louring no more defiance! but fear-smote

With none to chase him in his chariot whirl’d.

Was shown beside upon the solid floor

How dear Alcmaeon forc’d his mother rate

That ornament in evil hour receiv’d:

How in the temple on Sennacherib fell

His sons, and how a corpse they left him there.

Was shown the scath and cruel mangling made

By Tomyris on Cyrus, when she cried:

“Blood thou didst thirst for, take thy fill of blood!”

Was shown how routed in the battle fled

Th’ Assyrians, Holofernes slain, and e’en

The relics of the carnage. Troy I mark’d

In ashes and in caverns. Oh! how fall’n,

How abject, Ilion, was thy semblance there!

What master of the pencil or the style

Had trac’d the shades and lines, that might have made

The subtlest workman wonder? Dead the dead,

The living seem’d alive; with clearer view

His eye beheld not who beheld the truth,

Than mine what I did tread on, while I went

Low bending. Now swell out; and with stiff necks

Pass on, ye sons of Eve! veil not your looks,

Lest they descry the evil of your path!

I noted not (so busied was my thought)

How much we now had circled of the mount,

And of his course yet more the sun had spent,

When he, who with still wakeful caution went,

Admonish’d: “Raise thou up thy head: for know

Time is not now for slow suspense. Behold

That way an angel hasting towards us! Lo

Where duly the sixth handmaid doth return

From service on the day. Wear thou in look

And gesture seemly grace of reverent awe,

That gladly he may forward us aloft.

Consider that this day ne’er dawns again.”

Time’s loss he had so often warn’d me ’gainst,

I could not miss the scope at which he aim’d.

The goodly shape approach’d us, snowy white

In vesture, and with visage casting streams

Of tremulous lustre like the matin star.

His arms he open’d, then his wings; and spake:

“Onward: the steps, behold! are near; and now

Th’ ascent is without difficulty gain’d.”

A scanty few are they, who when they hear

Such tidings, hasten. O ye race of men

Though born to soar, why suffer ye a wind

So slight to baffle ye? He led us on

Where the rock parted; here against my front

Did beat his wings, then promis’d I should fare

In safety on my way. As to ascend

That steep, upon whose brow the chapel stands

(O’er Rubaconte, looking lordly down

On the well-guided city,) up the right

Th’ impetuous rise is broken by the steps

Carv’d in that old and simple age, when still

The registry and label rested safe;

Thus is th’ acclivity reliev’d, which here

Precipitous from the other circuit falls:

But on each hand the tall cliff presses close.

As ent’ring there we turn’d, voices, in strain

Ineffable, sang: “Blessed are the poor

In spirit.” Ah how far unlike to these

The straits of hell; here songs to usher us,

There shrieks of woe! We climb the holy stairs:

And lighter to myself by far I seem’d

Than on the plain before, whence thus I spake:

“Say, master, of what heavy thing have I

Been lighten’d, that scarce aught the sense of toil

Affects me journeying?” He in few replied:

“When sin’s broad characters, that yet remain

Upon thy temples, though well nigh effac’d,

Shall be, as one is, all clean razed out,

Then shall thy feet by heartiness of will

Be so o’ercome, they not alone shall feel

No sense of labour, but delight much more

Shall wait them urg’d along their upward way.”

Then like to one, upon whose head is plac’d

Somewhat he deems not of but from the becks

Of others as they pass him by; his hand

Lends therefore help to’ assure him, searches, finds,

And well performs such office as the eye

Wants power to execute: so stretching forth

The fingers of my right hand, did I find

Six only of the letters, which his sword

Who bare the keys had trac’d upon my brow.

The leader, as he mark’d mine action, smil’d.

CANTO XIII

We reach’d the summit of the scale, and stood

Upon the second buttress of that mount

Which healeth him who climbs. A cornice there,

Like to the former, girdles round the hill;

Save that its arch with sweep less ample bends.

Shadow nor image there is seen; all smooth

The rampart and the path, reflecting nought

But the rock’s sullen hue. “If here we wait

For some to question,” said the bard, “I fear

Our choice may haply meet too long delay.”

Then fixedly upon the sun his eyes

He fastn’d, made his right the central point

From whence to move, and turn’d the left aside.

“O pleasant light, my confidence and hope,

Conduct us thou,” he cried, “on this new way,

Where now I venture, leading to the bourn

We seek. The universal world to thee

Owes warmth and lustre. If no other cause

Forbid, thy beams should ever be our guide.”

Far, as is measur’d for a mile on earth,

In brief space had we journey’d; such prompt will

Impell’d; and towards us flying, now were heard

Spirits invisible, who courteously

Unto love’s table bade the welcome guest.

The voice, that first? flew by, call’d forth aloud,

“They have no wine;” so on behind us past,

Those sounds reiterating, nor yet lost

In the faint distance, when another came

Crying, “I am Orestes,” and alike

Wing’d its fleet way. “Oh father!” I exclaim’d,

“What tongues are these?” and as I question’d, lo!

A third exclaiming, “Love ye those have wrong’d you.”

“This circuit,” said my teacher, “knots the scourge

For envy, and the cords are therefore drawn

By charity’s correcting hand. The curb

Is of a harsher sound, as thou shalt hear

(If I deem rightly), ere thou reach the pass,

Where pardon sets them free. But fix thine eyes

Intently through the air, and thou shalt see

A multitude before thee seated, each

Along the shelving grot.” Then more than erst

I op’d my eyes, before me view’d, and saw

Shadows with garments dark as was the rock;

And when we pass’d a little forth, I heard

A crying, “Blessed Mary! pray for us,

Michael and Peter! all ye saintly host!”

I do not think there walks on earth this day

Man so remorseless, that he hath not yearn’d

With pity at the sight that next I saw.

Mine eyes a load of sorrow teemed, when now

I stood so near them, that their semblances

Came clearly to my view. Of sackcloth vile

Their cov’ring seem’d; and on his shoulder one

Did stay another, leaning, and all lean’d

Against the cliff. E’en thus the blind and poor,

Near the confessionals, to crave an alms,

Stand, each his head upon his fellow’s sunk,
So most to stir compassion, not by sound

Of words alone, but that, which moves not less,

The sight of mis’ry. And as never beam

Of noonday visiteth the eyeless man,

E’en so was heav’n a niggard unto these

Of his fair light; for, through the orbs of all,

A thread of wire, impiercing, knits them up,

As for the taming of a haggard hawk.

It were a wrong, methought, to pass and look

On others, yet myself the while unseen.

To my sage counsel therefore did I turn.

He knew the meaning of the mute appeal,

Nor waited for my questioning, but said:

“Speak; and be brief, be subtle in thy words.”

On that part of the cornice, whence no rim

Engarlands its steep fall, did Virgil come;

On the’ other side me were the spirits, their cheeks

Bathing devout with penitential tears,

That through the dread impalement forc’d a way.

I turn’d me to them, and “O shades!” said I,

“Assur’d that to your eyes unveil’d shall shine

The lofty light, sole object of your wish,

So may heaven’s grace clear whatsoe’er of foam

Floats turbid on the conscience, that thenceforth

The stream of mind roll limpid from its source,

As ye declare (for so shall ye impart

A boon I dearly prize) if any soul

Of Latium dwell among ye; and perchance

That soul may profit, if I learn so much.”

“My brother, we are each one citizens

Of one true city. Any thou wouldst say,

Who lived a stranger in Italia’s land.”

So heard I answering, as appeal’d, a voice

That onward came some space from whence I stood.

A spirit I noted, in whose look was mark’d

Expectance. Ask ye how? The chin was rais’d

As in one reft of sight. “Spirit,” said I,

“Who for thy rise are tutoring (if thou be

That which didst answer to me,) or by place

Or name, disclose thyself, that I may know thee.”

“I was,” it answer’d, “of Sienna: here

I cleanse away with these the evil life,

Soliciting with tears that He, who is,

Vouchsafe him to us. Though Sapia nam’d

In sapience I excell’d not, gladder far

Of others’ hurt, than of the good befell me.

That thou mayst own I now deceive thee not,

Hear, if my folly were not as I speak it.

When now my years slop’d waning down the arch,

It so bechanc’d, my fellow citizens

Near Colle met their enemies in the field,

And I pray’d God to grant what He had will’d.

There were they vanquish’d, and betook themselves

Unto the bitter passages of flight.

I mark’d the hunt, and waxing out of bounds

In gladness, lifted up my shameless brow,

And like the merlin cheated by a gleam,

Cried, “It is over. Heav’n! I fear thee not.”

Upon my verge of life I wish’d for peace

With God; nor repentance had supplied

What I did lack of duty, were it not

The hermit Piero, touch’d with charity,

In his devout orisons thought on me.

“But who art thou that question’st of our state,

Who go’st to my belief, with lids unclos’d,

And breathest in thy talk?”—“Mine eyes,” said I,

“May yet be here ta’en from me; but not long;

For they have not offended grievously

With envious glances. But the woe beneath

Urges my soul with more exceeding dread.

That nether load already weighs me down.”

She thus: “Who then amongst us here aloft

Hath brought thee, if thou weenest to return?
“He,” answer’d I, “who standeth mute beside me.

I live: of me ask therefore, chosen spirit,

If thou desire I yonder yet should move

For thee my mortal feet.”—“Oh!” she replied,

“This is so strange a thing, it is great sign

That God doth love thee. Therefore with thy prayer

Sometime assist me: and by that I crave,

Which most thou covetest, that if thy feet

E’er tread on Tuscan soil, thou save my fame

Amongst my kindred. Them shalt thou behold

With that vain multitude, who set their hope

On Telamone’s haven, there to fail

Confounded, more shall when the fancied stream

They sought of Dian call’d: but they who lead

Their navies, more than ruin’d hopes shall mourn.”

CANTO XIV

“Say who is he around our mountain winds,

Or ever death has prun’d his wing for flight,

That opes his eyes and covers them at will?”

“I know not who he is, but know thus much

He comes not singly. Do thou ask of him,

For thou art nearer to him, and take heed

Accost him gently, so that he may speak.”

Thus on the right two Spirits bending each

Toward the other, talk’d of me, then both

Addressing me, their faces backward lean’d,

And thus the one began: “O soul, who yet

Pent in the body, tendest towards the sky!

For charity, we pray thee’ comfort us,

Recounting whence thou com’st, and who thou art:

For thou dost make us at the favour shown thee

Marvel, as at a thing that ne’er hath been.”

“There stretches through the midst of Tuscany,”

I straight began: “a brooklet, whose well-head

Springs up in Falterona, with his race

Not satisfied, when he some hundred miles

Hath measur’d. From his banks bring, I this frame.

To tell you who I am were words misspent:

For yet my name scarce sounds on rumour’s lip.”

“If well I do incorp’rate with my thought

The meaning of thy speech," said he, who first

Addrest me, "thou dost speak of Arno's wave."

To whom the other: "Why hath he conceal'd

The title of that river, as a man

Doth of some horrible thing?" The spirit, who

Thereof was question'd, did acquit him thus:

"I know not: but 'tis fitting well the name

Should perish of that vale; for from the source

Where teems so plenteously the Alpine steep

Maim'd of Pelorus, (that doth scarcely pass

Beyond that limit,) even to the point

Whereunto ocean is restor'd, what heaven

Drains from th' exhaustless store for all earth's streams,

Throughout the space is virtue worried down,

As ’twere a snake, by all, for mortal foe,

Or through disastrous influence on the place,

Or else distortion of misguided wills,

That custom goads to evil: whence in those,

The dwellers in that miserable vale,

Nature is so transform’d, it seems as they

Had shar’d of Circe’s feeding. ’Midst brute swine,

Worthier of acorns than of other food

Created for man’s use, he shapeth first

His obscure way; then, sloping onward, finds

Curs, snarlers more in spite than power, from whom

He turns with scorn aside: still journeying down,

By how much more the curst and luckless foss

Swells out to largeness, e’en so much it finds

Dogs turning into wolves. Descending still

Through yet more hollow eddies, next he meets

A race of foxes, so replete with craft,

They do not fear that skill can master it.

Nor will I cease because my words are heard

By other ears than thine. It shall be well

For this man, if he keep in memory

What from no erring Spirit I reveal.

Lo! I behold thy grandson, that becomes

A hunter of those wolves, upon the shore

Of the fierce stream, and cows them all with dread:

Their flesh yet living sets he up to sale,

Then like an aged beast to slaughter dooms.

Many of life he reaves, himself of worth

And goodly estimation. Smear’d with gore

Mark how he issues from the rueful wood,

Leaving such havoc, that in thousand years

It spreads not to prime lustihood again.”

As one, who tidings hears of woe to come,

Changes his looks perturb’d, from whate’er part

The peril grasp him, so beheld I change

That spirit, who had turn’d to listen, struck

With sadness, soon as he had caught the word.

His visage and the other’s speech did raise

Desire in me to know the names of both,

whereof with meek entreaty I inquir’d.

The shade, who late addrest me, thus resum’d:

“Thy wish imports that I vouchsafe to do

For thy sake what thou wilt not do for mine.

But since God’s will is that so largely shine

His grace in thee, I will be liberal too.

Guido of Duca know then that I am.

Envy so parch’d my blood, that had I seen

A fellow man made joyous, thou hadst mark’d

A livid paleness overspread my cheek.

Such harvest reap I of the seed I sow’d.

O man, why place thy heart where there doth need

Exclusion of participants in good?

This is Rinieri’s spirit, this the boast

And honour of the house of Calboli,

Where of his worth no heritage remains.

Nor his the only blood, that hath been stript

(’twixt Po, the mount, the Reno, and the shore,)

Of all that truth or fancy asks for bliss;

But in those limits such a growth has sprung

Of rank and venom’d roots, as long would mock

Slow culture’s toil. Where is good Lizio? where

Manardi, Traversalo, and Carpigna?

O bastard slips of old Romagna’s line!

When in Bologna the low artisan,

And in Faenza yon Bernardin sprouts,

A gentle cyon from ignoble stem.

Wonder not, Tuscan, if thou see me weep,

When I recall to mind those once lov’d names,

Guido of Prata, and of Azzo him

That dwelt with you; Tignoso and his troop,

With Traversaro’s house and Anastagio’s,

(Each race disherited) and beside these,

The ladies and the knights, the toils and ease,

That witch’d us into love and courtesy;

Where now such malice reigns in recreant hearts.

O Brettinoro! wherefore tarriest still,

Since forth of thee thy family hath gone,

And many, hating evil, join’d their steps?

Well doeth he, that bids his lineage cease,

Bagnacavallo; Castracaro ill,

And Conio worse, who care to propagate

A race of Counties from such blood as theirs.

Well shall ye also do, Pagani, then

When from amongst you tries your demon child.

Not so, howe’er, that henceforth there remain

True proof of what ye were. O Hugolin!

Thou sprung of Fantolini’s line! thy name

Is safe, since none is look’d for after thee

To cloud its lustre, warping from thy stock.

But, Tuscan, go thy ways; for now I take

Far more delight in weeping than in words.

Such pity for your sakes hath wrung my heart.”

We knew those gentle spirits at parting heard

Our steps. Their silence therefore of our way

Assur’d us. Soon as we had quitted them,

Advancing onward, lo! a voice that seem’d

Like vollied light’ning, when it rives the air,

Met us, and shouted, “Whosoever finds

Will slay me,” then fled from us, as the bolt

Lanc’d sudden from a downward-rushing cloud.

When it had giv’n short truce unto our hearing,

Behold the other with a crash as loud

As the quick-following thunder: “Mark in me

Aglauros turn’d to rock.” I at the sound

Retreating drew more closely to my guide.

Now in mute stillness rested all the air:

And thus he spake: “There was the galling bit.

But your old enemy so baits his hook,

He drags you eager to him. Hence nor curb

Avails you, nor reclaiming call. Heav’n calls

And round about you wheeling courts your gaze

With everlasting beauties. Yet your eye

Turns with fond doting still upon the earth.

Therefore He smites you who discerneth all.”

CANTO XV

As much as ’twixt the third hour’s close and dawn,

Appeareth of heav’n’s sphere, that ever whirls

As restless as an infant in his play,

So much appear’d remaining to the sun

Of his slope journey towards the western goal.

Evening was there, and here the noon of night;

and full upon our forehead smote the beams.

For round the mountain, circling, so our path

Had led us, that toward the sun-set now

Direct we journey’d: when I felt a weight

Of more exceeding splendour, than before,

Press on my front. The cause unknown, amaze

Possess’d me, and both hands against my brow

Lifting, I interpos’d them, as a screen,

That of its gorgeous superflux of light

Clipp’d the diminish’d orb. As when the ray,

Striking On water or the surface clear

Of mirror, leaps unto the opposite part,

Ascending at a glance, e’en as it fell,

(And so much differs from the stone, that falls)

Through equal space, as practice skill hath shown;

Thus with refracted light before me seemed

The ground there smitten; whence in sudden haste

My sight recoil’d. “What is this, sire belov’d!

’Gainst which I strive to shield the sight in vain?”

Cried I, “and which towards us moving seems?”

“Marvel not, if the family of heav’n,”

He answer’d, “yet with dazzling radiance dim

Thy sense it is a messenger who comes,

Inviting man’s ascent. Such sights ere long,

Not grievous, shall impart to thee delight,

As thy perception is by nature wrought

Up to their pitch.” The blessed angel, soon

As we had reach’d him, hail’d us with glad voice:

“Here enter on a ladder far less steep

Than ye have yet encounter’d.” We forthwith

Ascending, heard behind us chanted sweet,

“Blessed the merciful,” and “happy thou!

That conquer’st.” Lonely each, my guide and I

Pursued our upward way; and as we went,

Some profit from his words I hop’d to win,

And thus of him inquiring, fram’d my speech:

“What meant Romagna’s spirit, when he spake

Of bliss exclusive with no partner shar’d?”

He straight replied: “No wonder, since he knows,

What sorrow waits on his own worst defect,

If he chide others, that they less may mourn.

Because ye point your wishes at a mark,

Where, by communion of possessors, part

Is lessen’d, envy bloweth up the sighs of men.

No fear of that might touch ye, if the love

Of higher sphere exalted your desire.

For there, by how much more they call it ours,

So much propriety of each in good

Increases more, and heighten’d charity

Wraps that fair cloister in a brighter flame.”

“Now lack I satisfaction more,” said I,

“Than if thou hadst been silent at the first,

And doubt more gathers on my lab’ring thought.

How can it chance, that good distributed,

The many, that possess it, makes more rich,

Than if ’t were shar’d by few?” He answering thus:

“Thy mind, reverting still to things of earth,

Strikes darkness from true light. The highest good

Unlimited, ineffable, doth so speed

To love, as beam to lucid body darts,

Giving as much of ardour as it finds.

The sempiternal effluence streams abroad

Spreading, wherever charity extends.

So that the more aspirants to that bliss

Are multiplied, more good is there to love,

And more is lov’d; as mirrors, that reflect,

Each unto other, propagated light.

If these my words avail not to allay

Thy thirsting, Beatrice thou shalt see,

Who of this want, and of all else thou hast,

Shall rid thee to the full. Provide but thou

That from thy temples may be soon eras’d,

E’en as the two already, those five scars,

That when they pain thee worst, then kindliest heal,”

“Thou,” I had said, “content’st me,” when I saw

The other round was gain’d, and wond’ring eyes

Did keep me mute. There suddenly I seem’d

By an ecstatic vision wrapt away;

And in a temple saw, methought, a crowd

Of many persons; and at th’ entrance stood

A dame, whose sweet demeanour did express

A mother’s love, who said, “Child! why hast thou

Dealt with us thus? Behold thy sire and I

Sorrowing have sought thee;” and so held her peace,

And straight the vision fled. A female next

Appear’d before me, down whose visage cours’d

Those waters, that grief forces out from one

By deep resentment stung, who seem’d to say:

“If thou, Pisistratus, be lord indeed

Over this city, nam’d with such debate

Of adverse gods, and whence each science sparkles,

Avenge thee of those arms, whose bold embrace

Hath clasp’d our daughter; “and to fuel, meseem’d,

Benign and meek, with visage undisturb’d,

Her sovran spake: “How shall we those requite,

Who wish us evil, if we thus condemn

The man that loves us?” After that I saw

A multitude, in fury burning, slay

With stones a stripling youth, and shout amain

“Destroy, destroy!” and him I saw, who bow’d

Heavy with death unto the ground, yet made

His eyes, unfolded upward, gates to heav’n,
Praying forgiveness of th’ Almighty Sire,

Amidst that cruel conflict, on his foes,

With looks, that With compassion to their aim.

Soon as my spirit, from her airy flight

Returning, sought again the things, whose truth

Depends not on her shaping, I observ’d

How she had rov’d to no unreal scenes

Meanwhile the leader, who might see I mov’d,

As one, who struggles to shake off his sleep,

Exclaim’d: “What ails thee, that thou canst not hold

Thy footing firm, but more than half a league

Hast travel’d with clos’d eyes and tott’ring gait,

Like to a man by wine or sleep o’ercharg’d?”

“Beloved father! so thou deign,” said I,

“To listen, I will tell thee what appear’d

Before me, when so fail’d my sinking steps.”

He thus: “Not if thy Countenance were mask’d

With hundred vizards, could a thought of thine

How small soe’er, elude me. What thou saw’st

Was shown, that freely thou mightst ope thy heart

To the waters of peace, that flow diffus’d

From their eternal fountain. I not ask’d,

What ails thee? for such cause as he doth, who

Looks only with that eye which sees no more,

When spiritless the body lies; but ask’d,

To give fresh vigour to thy foot. Such goads

The slow and loit’ring need; that they be found

Not wanting, when their hour of watch returns.”

So on we journey’d through the evening sky

Gazing intent, far onward, as our eyes

With level view could stretch against the bright

Vespertine ray: and lo! by slow degrees

Gath’ring, a fog made tow’rds us, dark as night.

There was no room for ’scaping; and that mist

Bereft us, both of sight and the pure air.

CANTO XVI

Hell’s dunnest gloom, or night unlustrous, dark,

Of every planes ’reft, and pall’d in clouds,

Did never spread before the sight a veil

In thickness like that fog, nor to the sense

So palpable and gross. Ent’ring its shade,

Mine eye endured not with unclosed lids;

Which marking, near me drew the faithful guide,

Offering me his shoulder for a stay.

As the blind man behind his leader walks,

Lest he should err, or stumble unawares

On what might harm him, or perhaps destroy,

I journey’d through that bitter air and foul,

Still list’ning to my escort’s warning voice,

“Look that from me thou part not.” Straight I heard

Voices, and each one seem’d to pray for peace,

And for compassion, to the Lamb of God

That taketh sins away. Their prelude still

Was “Agnus Dei,” and through all the choir,

One voice, one measure ran, that perfect seem’d

The concord of their song. “Are these I hear

Spirits, O master?” I exclaim’d; and he:

“Thou aim’st aright: these loose the bonds of wrath.”
“Now who art thou, that through our smoke dost cleave?

And speak’st of us, as thou thyself e’en yet

Dividest time by calends?” So one voice

Bespake me; whence my master said: “Reply;

And ask, if upward hence the passage lead.”

“O being! who dost make thee pure, to stand

Beautiful once more in thy Maker’s sight!

Along with me: and thou shalt hear and wonder.”

Thus I, whereto the spirit answering spake:
“Long as ’t is lawful for me, shall my steps

Follow on thine; and since the cloudy smoke

Forbids the seeing, hearing in its stead

Shall keep us join’d.” I then forthwith began

“Yet in my mortal swathing, I ascend

To higher regions, and am hither come

Through the fearful agony of hell.

And, if so largely God hath doled his grace,

That, clean beside all modern precedent,

He wills me to behold his kingly state,

From me conceal not who thou wast, ere death

Had loos’d thee; but instruct me: and instruct

If rightly to the pass I tend; thy words

The way directing as a safe escort.”

“I was of Lombardy, and Marco call’d:

Not inexperienc’d of the world, that worth

I still affected, from which all have turn’d

The nerveless bow aside. Thy course tends right

Unto the summit:” and, replying thus,

He added, “I beseech thee pray for me,

When thou shalt come aloft.” And I to him:

“Accept my faith for pledge I will perform

What thou requirest. Yet one doubt remains,

That wrings me sorely, if I solve it not,

Singly before it urg’d me, doubled now

By thine opinion, when I couple that

With one elsewhere declar’d, each strength’ning other.

The world indeed is even so forlorn

Of all good as thou speak’st it and so swarms

With every evil. Yet, beseech thee, point

The cause out to me, that myself may see,

And unto others show it: for in heaven

One places it, and one on earth below.”

Then heaving forth a deep and audible sigh,

“Brother!” he thus began, “the world is blind;

And thou in truth com’st from it. Ye, who live,

Do so each cause refer to heav’n above,

E’en as its motion of necessity

Drew with it all that moves. If this were so,

Free choice in you were none; nor justice would

There should be joy for virtue, woe for ill.

Your movements have their primal bent from heaven;

Not all; yet said I all; what then ensues?

Light have ye still to follow evil or good,

And of the will free power, which, if it stand

Firm and unwearied in Heav’n’s first assay,

Conquers at last, so it be cherish’d well,

Triumphant over all. To mightier force,

To better nature subject, ye abide

Free, not constrain’d by that, which forms in you

The reasoning mind uninfluenc’d of the stars.

If then the present race of mankind err,

Seek in yourselves the cause, and find it there.

Herein thou shalt confess me no false spy.

“Forth from his plastic hand, who charm’d beholds

Her image ere she yet exist, the soul

Comes like a babe, that wantons sportively

Weeping and laughing in its wayward moods,

As artless and as ignorant of aught,

Save that her Maker being one who dwells

With gladness ever, willingly she turns

To whate’er yields her joy. Of some slight good

The flavour soon she tastes; and, snar’d by that,

With fondness she pursues it, if no guide

Recall, no rein direct her wand’ring course.

Hence it behov’d, the law should be a curb;

A sovereign hence behov’d, whose piercing view

Might mark at least the fortress and main tower

Of the true city. Laws indeed there are:

But who is he observes them? None; not he,

Who goes before, the shepherd of the flock,

Who chews the cud but doth not cleave the hoof.

Therefore the multitude, who see their guide

Strike at the very good they covet most,

Feed there and look no further. Thus the cause

Is not corrupted nature in yourselves,

But ill-conducting, that hath turn’d the world

To evil. Rome, that turn’d it unto good,

Was wont to boast two suns, whose several beams

Cast light on either way, the world’s and God’s.

One since hath quench’d the other; and the sword

Is grafted on the crook; and so conjoin’d

Each must perforce decline to worse, unaw’d

By fear of other. If thou doubt me, mark

The blade: each herb is judg’d of by its seed.

That land, through which Adice and the Po

Their waters roll, was once the residence

Of courtesy and velour, ere the day,

That frown’d on Frederick; now secure may pass

Those limits, whosoe’er hath left, for shame,

To talk with good men, or come near their haunts.

Three aged ones are still found there, in whom

The old time chides the new: these deem it long

Ere God restore them to a better world:

The good Gherardo, of Palazzo he

Conrad, and Guido of Castello, nam’d

In Gallic phrase more fitly the plain Lombard.

On this at last conclude. The church of Rome,

Mixing two governments that ill assort,

Hath miss’d her footing, fall’n into the mire,

And there herself and burden much defil’d.”

“O Marco!” I replied, shine arguments

Convince me: and the cause I now discern

Why of the heritage no portion came

To Levi’s offspring. But resolve me this

Who that Gherardo is, that as thou sayst

Is left a sample of the perish’d race,

And for rebuke to this untoward age?”

“Either thy words,” said he, “deceive; or else

Are meant to try me; that thou, speaking Tuscan,

Appear’st not to have heard of good Gherado;

The sole addition that, by which I know him;

Unless I borrow’d from his daughter Gaia

Another name to grace him. God be with you.

I bear you company no more. Behold

The dawn with white ray glimm’ring through the mist.

I must away—the angel comes—ere he

Appear.” He said, and would not hear me more.

CANTO XVII

Call to remembrance, reader, if thou e’er

Hast, on a mountain top, been ta’en by cloud,

Through which thou saw’st no better, than the mole

Doth through opacous membrane; then, whene’er

The wat’ry vapours dense began to melt

Into thin air, how faintly the sun’s sphere

Seem’d wading through them; so thy nimble thought

May image, how at first I re-beheld

The sun, that bedward now his couch o’erhung.

Thus with my leader’s feet still equaling pace

From forth that cloud I came, when now expir’d

The parting beams from off the nether shores.

O quick and forgetive power! that sometimes dost

So rob us of ourselves, we take no mark

Though round about us thousand trumpets clang!

What moves thee, if the senses stir not? Light

Kindled in heav’n, spontaneous, self-inform’d,

Or likelier gliding down with swift illapse

By will divine. Portray’d before me came

The traces of her dire impiety,

Whose form was chang’d into the bird, that most

Delights itself in song: and here my mind

Was inwardly so wrapt, it gave no place

To aught that ask’d admittance from without.

Next shower’d into my fantasy a shape

As of one crucified, whose visage spake

Fell rancour, malice deep, wherein he died;

And round him Ahasuerus the great king,

Esther his bride, and Mordecai the just,

Blameless in word and deed. As of itself

That unsubstantial coinage of the brain

Burst, like a bubble, Which the water fails

That fed it; in my vision straight uprose

A damsel weeping loud, and cried, “O queen!

O mother! wherefore has intemperate ire

Driv’n thee to loath thy being? Not to lose

Lavinia, desp’rate thou hast slain thyself.

Now hast thou lost me. I am she, whose tears

Mourn, ere I fall, a mother’s timeless end.”

E’en as a sleep breaks off, if suddenly

New radiance strike upon the closed lids,

The broken slumber quivering ere it dies;

Thus from before me sunk that imagery

Vanishing, soon as on my face there struck

The light, outshining far our earthly beam.

As round I turn’d me to survey what place

I had arriv’d at, “Here ye mount,” exclaim’d

A voice, that other purpose left me none,

Save will so eager to behold who spake,

I could not choose but gaze. As ’fore the sun,

That weighs our vision down, and veils his form

In light transcendent, thus my virtue fail’d

Unequal. “This is Spirit from above,

Who marshals us our upward way, unsought;

And in his own light shrouds him. As a man

Doth for himself, so now is done for us.

For whoso waits imploring, yet sees need

Of his prompt aidance, sets himself prepar’d

For blunt denial, ere the suit be made.

Refuse we not to lend a ready foot

At such inviting: haste we to ascend,

Before it darken: for we may not then,

Till morn again return.” So spake my guide;

And to one ladder both address’d our steps;

And the first stair approaching, I perceiv’d

Near me as ’twere the waving of a wing,

That fann’d my face and whisper’d: “Blessed they

The peacemakers: they know not evil wrath.”

Now to such height above our heads were rais’d

The last beams, follow’d close by hooded night,

That many a star on all sides through the gloom

Shone out. “Why partest from me, O my strength?”

So with myself I commun’d; for I felt

My o’ertoil’d sinews slacken. We had reach’d

The summit, and were fix’d like to a bark

Arriv’d at land. And waiting a short space,

If aught should meet mine ear in that new round,

Then to my guide I turn’d, and said: “Lov’d sire!

Declare what guilt is on this circle purg’d.

If our feet rest, no need thy speech should pause.”

He thus to me: “The love of good, whate’er

Wanted of just proportion, here fulfils.

Here plies afresh the oar, that loiter’d ill.

But that thou mayst yet clearlier understand,

Give ear unto my words, and thou shalt cull

Some fruit may please thee well, from this delay.

“Creator, nor created being, ne’er,

My son,” he thus began, “was without love,

Or natural, or the free spirit’s growth.

Thou hast not that to learn. The natural still

Is without error; but the other swerves,

If on ill object bent, or through excess

Of vigour, or defect. While e’er it seeks

The primal blessings, or with measure due

Th’ inferior, no delight, that flows from it,

Partakes of ill. But let it warp to evil,

Or with more ardour than behooves, or less.

Pursue the good, the thing created then

Works ’gainst its Maker. Hence thou must infer

That love is germin of each virtue in ye,

And of each act no less, that merits pain.

Now since it may not be, but love intend

The welfare mainly of the thing it loves,

All from self-hatred are secure; and since

No being can be thought t’ exist apart

And independent of the first, a bar

Of equal force restrains from hating that.

“Grant the distinction just; and it remains

The’ evil must be another’s, which is lov’d.

Three ways such love is gender’d in your clay.

There is who hopes (his neighbour’s worth deprest,)

Preeminence himself, and coverts hence

For his own greatness that another fall.

There is who so much fears the loss of power,

Fame, favour, glory (should his fellow mount

Above him), and so sickens at the thought,

He loves their opposite: and there is he,

Whom wrong or insult seems to gall and shame

That he doth thirst for vengeance, and such needs

Must doat on other’s evil. Here beneath

This threefold love is mourn’d. Of th’ other sort

Be now instructed, that which follows good

But with disorder’d and irregular course.

“All indistinctly apprehend a bliss

On which the soul may rest, the hearts of all

Yearn after it, and to that wished bourn

All therefore strive to tend. If ye behold

Or seek it with a love remiss and lax,

This cornice after just repenting lays

Its penal torment on ye. Other good

There is, where man finds not his happiness:

It is not true fruition, not that blest

Essence, of every good the branch and root.

The love too lavishly bestow’d on this,

Along three circles over us, is mourn’d.

Account of that division tripartite

Expect not, fitter for thine own research.”

CANTO XVIII

The teacher ended, and his high discourse

Concluding, earnest in my looks inquir’d

If I appear’d content; and I, whom still

Unsated thirst to hear him urg’d, was mute,

Mute outwardly, yet inwardly I said:

“Perchance my too much questioning offends.”

But he, true father, mark’d the secret wish

By diffidence restrain’d, and speaking, gave

Me boldness thus to speak: “Master, my Sight

Gathers so lively virtue from thy beams,

That all, thy words convey, distinct is seen.

Wherefore I pray thee, father, whom this heart

Holds dearest! thou wouldst deign by proof t’ unfold

That love, from which as from their source thou bring’st

All good deeds and their opposite.” He then:

“To what I now disclose be thy clear ken

Directed, and thou plainly shalt behold

How much those blind have err’d, who make themselves

The guides of men. The soul, created apt

To love, moves versatile which way soe’er

Aught pleasing prompts her, soon as she is wak’d

By pleasure into act. Of substance true

Your apprehension forms its counterfeit,

And in you the ideal shape presenting

Attracts the soul’s regard. If she, thus drawn,

incline toward it, love is that inclining,

And a new nature knit by pleasure in ye.

Then as the fire points up, and mounting seeks

His birth-place and his lasting seat, e’en thus

Enters the captive soul into desire,

Which is a spiritual motion, that ne’er rests

Before enjoyment of the thing it loves.

Enough to show thee, how the truth from those

Is hidden, who aver all love a thing

Praise-worthy in itself: although perhaps

Its substance seem still good. Yet if the wax

Be good, it follows not th’ impression must.”

“What love is,” I return’d, “thy words, O guide!

And my own docile mind, reveal. Yet thence

New doubts have sprung. For from without if love

Be offer’d to us, and the spirit knows

No other footing, tend she right or wrong,

Is no desert of hers.” He answering thus:

“What reason here discovers I have power

To show thee: that which lies beyond, expect

From Beatrice, faith not reason’s task.

Spirit, substantial form, with matter join’d

Not in confusion mix’d, hath in itself

Specific virtue of that union born,

Which is not felt except it work, nor prov’d

But through effect, as vegetable life

By the green leaf. From whence his intellect

Deduced its primal notices of things,

Man therefore knows not, or his appetites

Their first affections; such in you, as zeal

In bees to gather honey; at the first,

Volition, meriting nor blame nor praise.

But o’er each lower faculty supreme,

That as she list are summon’d to her bar,

Ye have that virtue in you, whose just voice

Uttereth counsel, and whose word should keep

The threshold of assent. Here is the source,

Whence cause of merit in you is deriv’d,

E’en as the affections good or ill she takes,

Or severs, winnow’d as the chaff. Those men

Who reas’ning went to depth profoundest, mark’d

That innate freedom, and were thence induc’d

To leave their moral teaching to the world.

Grant then, that from necessity arise

All love that glows within you; to dismiss

Or harbour it, the pow’r is in yourselves.

Remember, Beatrice, in her style,

Denominates free choice by eminence

The noble virtue, if in talk with thee

She touch upon that theme.” The moon, well nigh

To midnight hour belated, made the stars

Appear to wink and fade; and her broad disk

Seem’d like a crag on fire, as up the vault

That course she journey’d, which the sun then warms,

When they of Rome behold him at his set.

Betwixt Sardinia and the Corsic isle.

And now the weight, that hung upon my thought,

Was lighten’d by the aid of that clear spirit,

Who raiseth Andes above Mantua’s name.

I therefore, when my questions had obtain’d

Solution plain and ample, stood as one

Musing in dreary slumber; but not long

Slumber’d; for suddenly a multitude,
The steep already turning, from behind,

Rush’d on. With fury and like random rout,

As echoing on their shores at midnight heard

Ismenus and Asopus, for his Thebes

If Bacchus’ help were needed; so came these

Tumultuous, curving each his rapid step,

By eagerness impell’d of holy love.

Soon they o’ertook us; with such swiftness mov’d

The mighty crowd. Two spirits at their head

Cried weeping; “Blessed Mary sought with haste

The hilly region. Caesar to subdue

Ilerda, darted in Marseilles his sting,

And flew to Spain.”—“Oh tarry not: away;”

The others shouted; “let not time be lost

Through slackness of affection. Hearty zeal

To serve reanimates celestial grace.”

“O ye, in whom intenser fervency

Haply supplies, where lukewarm erst ye fail’d,

Slow or neglectful, to absolve your part

Of good and virtuous, this man, who yet lives,

(Credit my tale, though strange) desires t’ ascend,

So morning rise to light us. Therefore say

Which hand leads nearest to the rifted rock?”

So spake my guide, to whom a shade return’d:

“Come after us, and thou shalt find the cleft.

We may not linger: such resistless will

Speeds our unwearied course. Vouchsafe us then

Thy pardon, if our duty seem to thee

Discourteous rudeness. In Verona I

Was abbot of San Zeno, when the hand

Of Barbarossa grasp’d Imperial sway,

That name, ne’er utter’d without tears in Milan.

And there is he, hath one foot in his grave,

Who for that monastery ere long shall weep,

Ruing his power misus’d: for that his son,

Of body ill compact, and worse in mind,

And born in evil, he hath set in place

Of its true pastor.” Whether more he spake,

Or here was mute, I know not: he had sped

E’en now so far beyond us. Yet thus much

I heard, and in rememb’rance treasur’d it.

He then, who never fail’d me at my need,

Cried, “Hither turn. Lo! two with sharp remorse

Chiding their sin!” In rear of all the troop

These shouted: “First they died, to whom the sea

Open’d, or ever Jordan saw his heirs:

And they, who with Aeneas to the end

Endur’d not suffering, for their portion chose

Life without glory.” Soon as they had fled

Past reach of sight, new thought within me rose

By others follow’d fast, and each unlike

Its fellow: till led on from thought to thought,

And pleasur’d with the fleeting train, mine eye

Was clos’d, and meditation chang’d to dream.

CANTO XIX

It was the hour, when of diurnal heat

No reliques chafe the cold beams of the moon,

O’erpower’d by earth, or planetary sway

Of Saturn; and the geomancer sees

His Greater Fortune up the east ascend,

Where gray dawn checkers first the shadowy cone;

When ’fore me in my dream a woman’s shape

There came, with lips that stammer’d, eyes aslant,

Distorted feet, hands maim’d, and colour pale.

I look’d upon her; and as sunshine cheers

Limbs numb’d by nightly cold, e’en thus my look

Unloos’d her tongue, next in brief space her form

Decrepit rais’d erect, and faded face

With love’s own hue illum’d. Recov’ring speech

She forthwith warbling such a strain began,

That I, how loth soe’er, could scarce have held

Attention from the song. “I,” thus she sang,

“I am the Siren, she, whom mariners

On the wide sea are wilder’d when they hear:

Such fulness of delight the list’ner feels.

I from his course Ulysses by my lay

Enchanted drew. Whoe’er frequents me once

Parts seldom; so I charm him, and his heart

Contented knows no void.” Or ere her mouth

Was clos’d, to shame her at her side appear’d

A dame of semblance holy. With stern voice

She utter’d; “Say, O Virgil, who is this?”

Which hearing, he approach’d, with eyes still bent

Toward that goodly presence: th’ other seiz’d her,

And, her robes tearing, open’d her before,

And show’d the belly to me, whence a smell,

Exhaling loathsome, wak’d me. Round I turn’d

Mine eyes, and thus the teacher: “At the least

Three times my voice hath call’d thee. Rise, begone.

Let us the opening find where thou mayst pass.”

I straightway rose. Now day, pour’d down from high,

Fill’d all the circuits of the sacred mount;

And, as we journey’d, on our shoulder smote

The early ray. I follow’d, stooping low

My forehead, as a man, o’ercharg’d with thought,

Who bends him to the likeness of an arch,

That midway spans the flood; when thus I heard,

“Come, enter here,” in tone so soft and mild,

As never met the ear on mortal strand.

With swan-like wings dispread and pointing up,

Who thus had spoken marshal’d us along,

Where each side of the solid masonry

The sloping, walls retir’d; then mov’d his plumes,

And fanning us, affirm’d that those, who mourn,

Are blessed, for that comfort shall be theirs.

“What aileth thee, that still thou look’st to earth?”

Began my leader; while th’ angelic shape

A little over us his station took.
“New vision,” I replied, “hath rais’d in me

Surmizings strange and anxious doubts, whereon

My soul intent allows no other thought

Or room or entrance.”—“Hast thou seen,” said he,

“That old enchantress, her, whose wiles alone

The spirits o’er us weep for? Hast thou seen

How man may free him of her bonds? Enough.

Let thy heels spurn the earth, and thy rais’d ken

Fix on the lure, which heav’n’s eternal King

Whirls in the rolling spheres.” As on his feet

The falcon first looks down, then to the sky

Turns, and forth stretches eager for the food,

That woos him thither; so the call I heard,

So onward, far as the dividing rock

Gave way, I journey’d, till the plain was reach’d.

On the fifth circle when I stood at large,

A race appear’d before me, on the ground

All downward lying prone and weeping sore.

“My soul hath cleaved to the dust,” I heard

With sighs so deep, they well nigh choak’d the words.

“O ye elect of God, whose penal woes

Both hope and justice mitigate, direct

Tow’rds the steep rising our uncertain way.”

“If ye approach secure from this our doom,

Prostration—and would urge your course with speed,

See that ye still to rightward keep the brink.”

So them the bard besought; and such the words,

Beyond us some short space, in answer came.

I noted what remain’d yet hidden from them:

Thence to my liege’s eyes mine eyes I bent,

And he, forthwith interpreting their suit,

Beckon’d his glad assent. Free then to act,

As pleas’d me, I drew near, and took my stand

O`er that shade, whose words I late had mark’d.

And, “Spirit!” I said, “in whom repentant tears

Mature that blessed hour, when thou with God

Shalt find acceptance, for a while suspend

For me that mightier care. Say who thou wast,

Why thus ye grovel on your bellies prone,

And if in aught ye wish my service there,

Whence living I am come.” He answering spake

“The cause why Heav’n our back toward his cope

Reverses, shalt thou know: but me know first

The successor of Peter, and the name

And title of my lineage from that stream,

That’ twixt Chiaveri and Siestri draws

His limpid waters through the lowly glen.

A month and little more by proof I learnt,

With what a weight that robe of sov’reignty

Upon his shoulder rests, who from the mire

Would guard it: that each other fardel seems

But feathers in the balance. Late, alas!

Was my conversion: but when I became

Rome’s pastor, I discern’d at once the dream

And cozenage of life, saw that the heart

Rested not there, and yet no prouder height

Lur’d on the climber: wherefore, of that life

No more enamour’d, in my bosom love

Of purer being kindled. For till then

I was a soul in misery, alienate

From God, and covetous of all earthly things;

Now, as thou seest, here punish’d for my doting.

Such cleansing from the taint of avarice

Do spirits converted need. This mount inflicts

No direr penalty. E’en as our eyes

Fasten’d below, nor e’er to loftier clime

Were lifted, thus hath justice level’d us

Here on the earth. As avarice quench’d our love

Of good, without which is no working, thus

Here justice holds us prison’d, hand and foot

Chain’d down and bound, while heaven’s just Lord shall please.

So long to tarry motionless outstretch’d.”

My knees I stoop’d, and would have spoke; but he,

Ere my beginning, by his ear perceiv’d

I did him reverence; and “What cause,” said he,

“Hath bow’d thee thus!”—“Compunction,” I rejoin’d.

“And inward awe of your high dignity.”
“Up,” he exclaim’d, “brother! upon thy feet

Arise: err not: thy fellow servant I,

(Thine and all others’) of one Sovran Power.

If thou hast ever mark’d those holy sounds

Of gospel truth, ‘nor shall be given ill marriage,’

Thou mayst discern the reasons of my speech.

Go thy ways now; and linger here no more.

Thy tarrying is a let unto the tears,

With which I hasten that whereof thou spak’st.

I have on earth a kinswoman; her name

Alagia, worthy in herself, so ill

Example of our house corrupt her not:

And she is all remaineth of me there.”

CANTO XX

Ill strives the will, ’gainst will more wise that strives

His pleasure therefore to mine own preferr’d,

I drew the sponge yet thirsty from the wave.

Onward I mov’d: he also onward mov’d,

Who led me, coasting still, wherever place

Along the rock was vacant, as a man

Walks near the battlements on narrow wall.

For those on th’ other part, who drop by drop

Wring out their all-infecting malady,

Too closely press the verge. Accurst be thou!

Inveterate wolf! whose gorge ingluts more prey,

Than every beast beside, yet is not fill’d!

So bottomless thy maw!—Ye spheres of heaven!

To whom there are, as seems, who attribute

All change in mortal state, when is the day

Of his appearing, for whom fate reserves

To chase her hence? —With wary steps and slow

We pass’d; and I attentive to the shades,

Whom piteously I heard lament and wail;
And, ’midst the wailing, one before us heard

Cry out “O blessed Virgin!” as a dame

In the sharp pangs of childbed; and “How poor

Thou wast,” it added, “witness that low roof

Where thou didst lay thy sacred burden down.

O good Fabricius! thou didst virtue choose

With poverty, before great wealth with vice.”

The words so pleas’d me, that desire to know

The spirit, from whose lip they seem’d to come,

Did draw me onward. Yet it spake the gift

Of Nicholas, which on the maidens he

Bounteous bestow’d, to save their youthful prime

Unblemish’d. “Spirit! who dost speak of deeds

So worthy, tell me who thou was," I said,

"And why thou dost with single voice renew

Memorial of such praise. That boon vouchsaf'd

Haply shall meet reward; if I return

To finish the Short pilgrimage of life,

Still speeding to its close on restless wing."

"I," answer'd he, "will tell thee, not for hell,

Which thence I look for; but that in thyself

Grace so exceeding shines, before thy time

Of mortal dissolution. I was root

Of that ill plant, whose shade such poison sheds

O'er all the Christian land, that seldom thence

Good fruit is gather'd. Vengeance soon should come,

Had Ghent and Douay, Lille and Bruges power;

And vengeance I of heav’n’s great Judge implore.

Hugh Capet was I high: from me descend

The Philips and the Louis, of whom France

Newly is govern’d; born of one, who ply’d

The slaughterer’s trade at Paris. When the race

Of ancient kings had vanish’d (all save one

Wrapt up in sable weeds) within my gripe

I found the reins of empire, and such powers

Of new acquirement, with full store of friends,

That soon the widow’d circlet of the crown

Was girt upon the temples of my son,

He, from whose bones th’ anointed race begins.

Till the great dower of Provence had remov’d

The stains, that yet obscur’d our lowly blood,

Its sway indeed was narrow, but howe’er

It wrought no evil: there, with force and lies,

Began its rapine; after, for amends,

Poitou it seiz’d, Navarre and Gascony.

To Italy came Charles, and for amends

Young Conradine an innocent victim slew,

And sent th’ angelic teacher back to heav’n,

Still for amends. I see the time at hand,

That forth from France invites another Charles

To make himself and kindred better known.

Unarm’d he issues, saving with that lance,

Which the arch-traitor tilted with; and that

He carries with so home a thrust, as rives

The bowels of poor Florence. No increase

Of territory hence, but sin and shame

Shall be his guerdon, and so much the more

As he more lightly deems of such foul wrong.

I see the other, who a prisoner late

Had steps on shore, exposing to the mart

His daughter, whom he bargains for, as do

The Corsairs for their slaves. O avarice!

What canst thou more, who hast subdued our blood

So wholly to thyself, they feel no care

Of their own flesh? To hide with direr guilt

Past ill and future, lo! the flower-de-luce

Enters Alagna! in his Vicar Christ

Himself a captive, and his mockery

Acted again! Lo! lo his holy lip

The vinegar and gall once more applied!

And he ’twixt living robbers doom’d to bleed!

Lo! the new Pilate, of whose cruelty

Such violence cannot fill the measure up,

With no degree to sanction, pushes on

Into the temple his yet eager sails!

“O sovran Master! when shall I rejoice

To see the vengeance, which thy wrath well-pleas’d

In secret silence broods?—While daylight lasts,

So long what thou didst hear of her, sole spouse

Of the Great Spirit, and on which thou turn’dst

To me for comment, is the general theme

Of all our prayers: but when it darkens, then

A different strain we utter, then record

Pygmalion, whom his gluttonous thirst of gold

Made traitor, robber, parricide: the woes

Of Midas, which his greedy wish ensued,

Mark’d for derision to all future times:

And the fond Achan, how he stole the prey,

That yet he seems by Joshua’s ire pursued.

Sapphira with her husband next, we blame;

And praise the forefeet, that with furious ramp

Spurn’d Heliodorus. All the mountain round

Rings with the infamy of Thracia’s king,

Who slew his Phrygian charge: and last a shout

Ascends: “Declare, O Crassus! for thou know’st,

The flavour of thy gold.” The voice of each

Now high now low, as each his impulse prompts,

Is led through many a pitch, acute or grave.

Therefore, not singly, I erewhile rehears’d

That blessedness we tell of in the day:

But near me none beside his accent rais’d.”

From him we now had parted, and essay’d

With utmost efforts to surmount the way,

When I did feel, as nodding to its fall,

The mountain tremble; whence an icy chill

Seiz’d on me, as on one to death convey’d.

So shook not Delos, when Latona there

Couch’d to bring forth the twin-born eyes of heaven.

Forthwith from every side a shout arose

So vehement, that suddenly my guide

Drew near, and cried: “Doubt not, while I conduct thee.”

“Glory!” all shouted (such the sounds mine ear

Gather’d from those, who near me swell’d the sounds)

“Glory in the highest be to God.” We stood

Immovably suspended, like to those,

The shepherds, who first heard in Bethlehem’s field

That song: till ceas’d the trembling, and the song

Was ended: then our hallow’d path resum’d,

Eying the prostrate shadows, who renew’d

Their custom’d mourning. Never in my breast

Did ignorance so struggle with desire

Of knowledge, if my memory do not err,

As in that moment; nor through haste dar’d I

To question, nor myself could aught discern,

So on I far’d in thoughtfulness and dread.

CANTO XXI

The natural thirst, ne’er quench’d but from the well,

Whereof the woman of Samaria crav’d,

Excited: haste along the cumber’d path,

After my guide, impell’d; and pity mov’d

My bosom for the ’vengeful deed, though just.

When lo! even as Luke relates, that Christ

Appear’d unto the two upon their way,

New-risen from his vaulted grave; to us

A shade appear’d, and after us approach’d,

Contemplating the crowd beneath its feet.

We were not ware of it; so first it spake,

Saying, “God give you peace, my brethren!” then

Sudden we turn’d: and Virgil such salute,

As fitted that kind greeting, gave, and cried:

“Peace in the blessed council be thy lot

Awarded by that righteous court, which me

To everlasting banishment exiles!”

“How!” he exclaim’d, nor from his speed meanwhile

Desisting, “If that ye be spirits, whom God

Vouchsafes not room above, who up the height

Has been thus far your guide?” To whom the bard:

“If thou observe the tokens, which this man

Trac’d by the finger of the angel bears,

’Tis plain that in the kingdom of the just

He needs must share. But sithence she, whose wheel

Spins day and night, for him not yet had drawn

That yarn, which, on the fatal distaff pil’d,

Clotho apportions to each wight that breathes,

His soul, that sister is to mine and thine,

Not of herself could mount, for not like ours

Her ken: whence I, from forth the ample gulf

Of hell was ta’en, to lead him, and will lead

Far as my lore avails. But, if thou know,

Instruct us for what cause, the mount erewhile

Thus shook and trembled: wherefore all at once

Seem’d shouting, even from his wave-wash’d foot.”

That questioning so tallied with my wish,

The thirst did feel abatement of its edge

E’en from expectance. He forthwith replied,

“In its devotion nought irregular

This mount can witness, or by punctual rule

Unsanction’d; here from every change exempt.

Other than that, which heaven in itself

Doth of itself receive, no influence

Can reach us. Tempest none, shower, hail or snow,

Hoar frost or dewy moistness, higher falls

Than that brief scale of threefold steps: thick clouds

Nor scudding rack are ever seen: swift glance

Ne’er lightens, nor Thaumantian Iris gleams,

That yonder often shift on each side heav’n.

Vapour adust doth never mount above

The highest of the trinal stairs, whereon

Peter’s vicegerent stands. Lower perchance,

With various motion rock’d, trembles the soil:

But here, through wind in earth’s deep hollow pent,

I know not how, yet never trembled: then

Trembles, when any spirit feels itself

So purified, that it may rise, or move

For rising, and such loud acclaim ensues.

Purification by the will alone

Is prov’d, that free to change society

Seizes the soul rejoicing in her will.

Desire of bliss is present from the first;

But strong propension hinders, to that wish

By the just ordinance of heav’n oppos’d;

Propension now as eager to fulfil

Th’ allotted torment, as erewhile to sin.

And I who in this punishment had lain

Five hundred years and more, but now have felt

Free wish for happier clime. Therefore thou felt’st

The mountain tremble, and the spirits devout

Heard’st, over all his limits, utter praise

To that liege Lord, whom I entreat their joy

To hasten.” Thus he spake: and since the draught

Is grateful ever as the thirst is keen,

No words may speak my fullness of content.

“Now,” said the instructor sage, “I see the net

That takes ye here, and how the toils are loos’d,

Why rocks the mountain and why ye rejoice.

Vouchsafe, that from thy lips I next may learn,

Who on the earth thou wast, and wherefore here

So many an age wert prostrate.”—“In that time,

When the good Titus, with Heav’n’s King to help,

Aveng’d those piteous gashes, whence the blood

By Judas sold did issue, with the name

Most lasting and most honour’d there was I

Abundantly renown’d,” the shade reply’d,

“Not yet with faith endued. So passing sweet

My vocal Spirit, from Tolosa, Rome

To herself drew me, where I merited

A myrtle garland to inwreathe my brow.

Statius they name me still. Of Thebes I sang,

And next of great Achilles: but i’ th’ way

Fell with the second burthen. Of my flame

Those sparkles were the seeds, which I deriv’d

From the bright fountain of celestial fire

That feeds unnumber’d lamps, the song I mean

Which sounds Aeneas’ wand’rings: that the breast

I hung at, that the nurse, from whom my veins

Drank inspiration: whose authority

Was ever sacred with me. To have liv’d

Coeval with the Mantuan, I would bide

The revolution of another sun

Beyond my stated years in banishment.”

The Mantuan, when he heard him, turn’d to me,

And holding silence: by his countenance

Enjoin’d me silence but the power which wills,

Bears not supreme control: laughter and tears

Follow so closely on the passion prompts them,

They wait not for the motions of the will

In natures most sincere. I did but smile,

As one who winks; and thereupon the shade

Broke off, and peer’d into mine eyes, where best

Our looks interpret. “So to good event

Mayst thou conduct such great emprize,” he cried,

“Say, why across thy visage beam’d, but now,

The lightning of a smile!” On either part

Now am I straiten’d; one conjures me speak,

Th’ other to silence binds me: whence a sigh

I utter, and the sigh is heard. “Speak on;”

The teacher cried; “and do not fear to speak,

But tell him what so earnestly he asks.”

Whereon I thus: “Perchance, O ancient spirit!

Thou marvel’st at my smiling. There is room

For yet more wonder. He who guides my ken

On high, he is that Mantuan, led by whom

Thou didst presume of men and gods to sing.

If other cause thou deem’dst for which I smil’d,

Leave it as not the true one; and believe

Those words, thou spak’st of him, indeed the cause.”

Now down he bent t’ embrace my teacher’s feet;

But he forbade him: “Brother! do it not:

Thou art a shadow, and behold’st a shade.”

He rising answer’d thus: “Now hast thou prov’d

The force and ardour of the love I bear thee,

When I forget we are but things of air,

And as a substance treat an empty shade.”

CANTO XXII

Now we had left the angel, who had turn’d

To the sixth circle our ascending step,

One gash from off my forehead raz’d: while they,

Whose wishes tend to justice, shouted forth:

“Blessed!” and ended with, “I thirst:” and I,

More nimble than along the other straits,

So journey’d, that, without the sense of toil,

I follow’d upward the swift-footed shades;

When Virgil thus began: “Let its pure flame

From virtue flow, and love can never fail

To warm another’s bosom’ so the light

Shine manifestly forth. Hence from that hour,

When ’mongst us in the purlieus of the deep,

Came down the spirit of Aquinum’s hard,

Who told of thine affection, my good will

Hath been for thee of quality as strong

As ever link’d itself to one not seen.

Therefore these stairs will now seem short to me.

But tell me: and if too secure I loose

The rein with a friend’s license, as a friend

Forgive me, and speak now as with a friend:

How chanc’d it covetous desire could find

Place in that bosom, ’midst such ample store

Of wisdom, as thy zeal had treasur’d there?”

First somewhat mov’d to laughter by his words,

Statius replied: “Each syllable of thine

Is a dear pledge of love. Things oft appear

That minister false matters to our doubts,

When their true causes are remov’d from sight.

Thy question doth assure me, thou believ’st

I was on earth a covetous man, perhaps

Because thou found’st me in that circle plac’d.

Know then I was too wide of avarice:

And e’en for that excess, thousands of moons

Have wax’d and wan’d upon my sufferings.

And were it not that I with heedful care

Noted where thou exclaim’st as if in ire

With human nature, ‘Why, thou cursed thirst

Of gold! dost not with juster measure guide

The appetite of mortals?’ I had met

The fierce encounter of the voluble rock.

Then was I ware that with too ample wing

The hands may haste to lavishment, and turn’d,

As from my other evil, so from this

In penitence. How many from their grave

Shall with shorn locks arise, who living, aye

And at life’s last extreme, of this offence,

Through ignorance, did not repent. And know,

The fault which lies direct from any sin

In level opposition, here With that

Wastes its green rankness on one common heap.

Therefore if I have been with those, who wail

Their avarice, to cleanse me, through reverse

Of their transgression, such hath been my lot.”

To whom the sovran of the pastoral song:

“While thou didst sing that cruel warfare wag’d

By the twin sorrow of Jocasta’s womb,

From thy discourse with Clio there, it seems

As faith had not been shine: without the which

Good deeds suffice not. And if so, what sun

Rose on thee, or what candle pierc’d the dark

That thou didst after see to hoist the sail,

And follow, where the fisherman had led?”

He answering thus: “By thee conducted first,

I enter’d the Parnassian grots, and quaff’d

Of the clear spring; illumin’d first by thee

Open’d mine eyes to God. Thou didst, as one,

Who, journeying through the darkness, hears a light

Behind, that profits not himself, but makes

His followers wise, when thou exclaimedst, ‘Lo!

A renovated world! Justice return’d!

Times of primeval innocence restor’d!

And a new race descended from above!’

Poet and Christian both to thee I owed.

That thou mayst mark more clearly what I trace,

My hand shall stretch forth to inform the lines

With livelier colouring. Soon o’er all the world,

By messengers from heav’n, the true belief

Teem’d now prolific, and that word of thine

Accordant, to the new instructors chim’d.

Induc’d by which agreement, I was wont

Resort to them; and soon their sanctity

So won upon me, that, Domitian’s rage

Pursuing them, I mix’d my tears with theirs,

And, while on earth I stay’d, still succour’d them;

And their most righteous customs made me scorn

All sects besides. Before I led the Greeks

In tuneful fiction, to the streams of Thebes,

I was baptiz’d; but secretly, through fear,

Remain’d a Christian, and conform’d long time

To Pagan rites. Five centuries and more,

T for that lukewarmness was fain to pace

Round the fourth circle. Thou then, who hast rais’d

The covering, which did hide such blessing from me,

Whilst much of this ascent is yet to climb,

Say, if thou know, where our old Terence bides,

Caecilius, Plautus, Varro: if condemn’d

They dwell, and in what province of the deep.”

“These,” said my guide, “with Persius and myself,

And others many more, are with that Greek,

Of mortals, the most cherish’d by the Nine,

In the first ward of darkness. There ofttimes

We of that mount hold converse, on whose top

For aye our nurses live. We have the bard

Of Pella, and the Teian, Agatho,

Simonides, and many a Grecian else

Ingarlanded with laurel. Of thy train

Antigone is there, Deiphile,

Argia, and as sorrowful as erst

Ismene, and who show'd Langia's wave:

Deidamia with her sisters there,

And blind Tiresias' daughter, and the bride

Sea-born of Peleus." Either poet now

Was silent, and no longer by th' ascent

Or the steep walls obstructed, round them cast

Inquiring eyes. Four handmaids of the day

Had finish’d now their office, and the fifth

Was at the chariot-beam, directing still

Its balmy point aloof, when thus my guide:

“Methinks, it well behooves us to the brink

Bend the right shoulder’ circuiting the mount,

As we have ever us’d.” So custom there

Was usher to the road, the which we chose

Less doubtful, as that worthy shade complied.

They on before me went; I sole pursued,

List’ning their speech, that to my thoughts convey’d

Mysterious lessons of sweet poesy.

But soon they ceas’d; for midway of the road

A tree we found, with goodly fruitage hung,

And pleasant to the smell: and as a fir

Upward from bough to bough less ample spreads,

So downward this less ample spread, that none.

Methinks, aloft may climb. Upon the side,

That clos’d our path, a liquid crystal fell

From the steep rock, and through the sprays above

Stream’d showering. With associate step the bards

Drew near the plant; and from amidst the leaves

A voice was heard: “Ye shall be chary of me;”

And after added: “Mary took more thought

For joy and honour of the nuptial feast,

Than for herself who answers now for you.

The women of old Rome were satisfied

With water for their beverage. Daniel fed

On pulse, and wisdom gain’d. The primal age

Was beautiful as gold; and hunger then

Made acorns tasteful, thirst each rivulet

Run nectar. Honey and locusts were the food,

Whereon the Baptist in the wilderness

Fed, and that eminence of glory reach’d

And greatness, which the’ Evangelist records.”

CANTO XXIII

On the green leaf mine eyes were fix’d, like his

Who throws away his days in idle chase

Of the diminutive, when thus I heard

The more than father warn me: “Son! our time

Asks thriftier using. Linger not: away.”

Thereat my face and steps at once I turn’d

Toward the sages, by whose converse cheer’d

I journey’d on, and felt no toil: and lo!

A sound of weeping and a song: “My lips,

O Lord!” and these so mingled, it gave birth

To pleasure and to pain. “O Sire, belov’d!

Say what is this I hear?” Thus I inquir’d.

“Spirits,” said he, “who as they go, perchance,

Their debt of duty pay.” As on their road

The thoughtful pilgrims, overtaking some

Not known unto them, turn to them, and look,

But stay not; thus, approaching from behind

With speedier motion, eyed us, as they pass’d,

A crowd of spirits, silent and devout.

The eyes of each were dark and hollow: pale

Their visage, and so lean withal, the bones

Stood staring thro’ the skin. I do not think

Thus dry and meagre Erisicthon show’d,

When pinc’ed by sharp-set famine to the quick.

“Lo!” to myself I mus’d, “the race, who lost

Jerusalem, when Mary with dire beak

Prey’d on her child.” The sockets seem’d as rings,

From which the gems were drops. Who reads the name

Of man upon his forehead, there the M

Had trac’d most plainly. Who would deem, that scent

Of water and an apple, could have prov’d

Powerful to generate such pining want,

Not knowing how it wrought? While now I stood

Wond’ring what thus could waste them (for the cause

Of their gaunt hollowness and scaly rind

Appear’d not) lo! a spirit turn’d his eyes

In their deep-sunken cell, and fasten’d then

On me, then cried with vehemence aloud:

“What grace is this vouchsaf’d me?” By his looks

I ne’er had recogniz’d him: but the voice

Brought to my knowledge what his cheer conceal’d.

Remembrance of his alter’d lineaments

Was kindled from that spark; and I agniz’d

The visage of Forese. “Ah! respect

This wan and leprous wither’d skin,” thus he

Suppliant implor’d, “this macerated flesh.

Speak to me truly of thyself. And who

Are those twain spirits, that escort thee there?

Be it not said thou Scorn’st to talk with me.”
“That face of thine,” I answer’d him, “which dead

I once bewail’d, disposes me not less

For weeping, when I see It thus transform’d.

Say then, by Heav’n, what blasts ye thus? The whilst

I wonder, ask not Speech from me: unapt

Is he to speak, whom other will employs.”

He thus: “The water and tee plant we pass’d,

Virtue possesses, by th’ eternal will

Infus’d, the which so pines me. Every spirit,

Whose song bewails his gluttony indulg’d

Too grossly, here in hunger and in thirst

Is purified. The odour, which the fruit,

And spray, that showers upon the verdure, breathe,

Inflames us with desire to feed and drink.

Nor once alone encompassing our route

We come to add fresh fuel to the pain:

Pain, said I? solace rather: for that will

To the tree leads us, by which Christ was led

To call Elias, joyful when he paid

Our ransom from his vein.” I answering thus:

“Forese! from that day, in which the world

For better life thou changedst, not five years

Have circled. If the power of sinning more

Were first concluded in thee, ere thou knew’st

That kindly grief, which re-espouses us

To God, how hither art thou come so soon?

I thought to find thee lower, there, where time

Is recompense for time.” He straight replied:

“To drink up the sweet wormwood of affliction

I have been brought thus early by the tears

Stream’d down my Nella’s cheeks. Her prayers devout,

Her sighs have drawn me from the coast, where oft

Expectance lingers, and have set me free

From th’ other circles. In the sight of God

So much the dearer is my widow priz’d,

She whom I lov’d so fondly, as she ranks

More singly eminent for virtuous deeds.

The tract most barb’rous of Sardinia’s isle,

Hath dames more chaste and modester by far

Than that wherein I left her. O sweet brother!

What wouldst thou have me say? A time to come

Stands full within my view, to which this hour

Shall not be counted of an ancient date,

When from the pulpit shall be loudly warn’d

Th’ unblushing dames of Florence, lest they bare

Unkerchief’d bosoms to the common gaze.

What savage women hath the world e’er seen,

What Saracens, for whom there needed scourge

Of spiritual or other discipline,

To force them walk with cov’ring on their limbs!

But did they see, the shameless ones, that Heav’n

Wafts on swift wing toward them, while I speak,

Their mouths were op’d for howling: they shall taste

Of Borrow (unless foresight cheat me here)

Or ere the cheek of him be cloth’d with down

Who is now rock’d with lullaby asleep.

Ah! now, my brother, hide thyself no more,

Thou seest how not I alone but all

Gaze, where thou veil’st the intercepted sun.”

Whence I replied: “If thou recall to mind

What we were once together, even yet

Remembrance of those days may grieve thee sore.

That I forsook that life, was due to him

Who there precedes me, some few evenings past,

When she was round, who shines with sister lamp

To his, that glisters yonder," and I show'd

The sun. "Tis he, who through profoundest night

Of he true dead has brought me, with this flesh

As true, that follows. From that gloom the aid

Of his sure comfort drew me on to climb,

And climbing wind along this mountain-steep,

Which rectifies in you whate'er the world

Made crooked and deprav'd I have his word,

That he will bear me company as far

As till I come where Beatrice dwells:

But there must leave me. Virgil is that spirit,

Who thus hath promis'd," and I pointed to him;

“The other is that shade, for whom so late

Your realm, as he arose, exulting shook

Through every pendent cliff and rocky bound.”

CANTO XXIV

Our journey was not slacken’d by our talk,

Nor yet our talk by journeying. Still we spake,

And urg’d our travel stoutly, like a ship

When the wind sits astern. The shadowy forms,
That seem’d things dead and dead again, drew in

At their deep-delved orbs rare wonder of me,

Perceiving I had life; and I my words

Continued, and thus spake; “He journeys up

Perhaps more tardily then else he would,

For others’ sake. But tell me, if thou know’st,

Where is Piccarda? Tell me, if I see

Any of mark, among this multitude,

Who eye me thus.”—“My sister (she for whom,

’Twixt beautiful and good I cannot say

Which name was fitter) wears e’en now her crown,

And triumphs in Olympus.” Saying this,

He added: “Since spare diet hath so worn

Our semblance out, ’t is lawful here to name

Each one. This,” and his finger then he rais’d,

“Is Buonaggiuna,—Buonaggiuna, he

Of Lucca: and that face beyond him, pierc’d

Unto a leaner fineness than the rest,

Had keeping of the church: he was of Tours,

And purges by wan abstinence away

Bolsena’s eels and cups of muscadel.”

He show’d me many others, one by one,

And all, as they were nam’d, seem’d well content;

For no dark gesture I discern’d in any.

I saw through hunger Ubaldino grind

His teeth on emptiness; and Boniface,

That wav’d the crozier o’er a num’rous flock.

I saw the Marquis, who tad time erewhile

To swill at Forli with less drought, yet so

Was one ne’er sated. I howe’er, like him,

That gazing ’midst a crowd, singles out one,

So singled him of Lucca; for methought

Was none amongst them took such note of me.

Somewhat I heard him whisper of Gentucca:

The sound was indistinct, and murmur’d there,

Where justice, that so strips them, fix’d her sting.

“Spirit!” said I, “it seems as thou wouldst fain

Speak with me. Let me hear thee. Mutual wish

To converse prompts, which let us both indulge.”

He, answ’ring, straight began: “Woman is born,

Whose brow no wimple shades yet, that shall make

My city please thee, blame it as they may.

Go then with this forewarning. If aught false

My whisper too implied, th’ event shall tell

But say, if of a truth I see the man

Of that new lay th’ inventor, which begins

With ‘Ladies, ye that con the lore of love’.”

To whom I thus: “Count of me but as one

Who am the scribe of love; that, when he breathes,

Take up my pen, and, as he dictates, write.”

“Brother!” said he, “the hind’rance which once held

The notary with Guittone and myself,

Short of that new and sweeter style I hear,

Is now disclos’d. I see how ye your plumes

Stretch, as th’ inditer guides them; which, no question,

Ours did not. He that seeks a grace beyond,

Sees not the distance parts one style from other.”

And, as contented, here he held his peace.

Like as the bird, that winter near the Nile,

In squared regiment direct their course,

Then stretch themselves in file for speedier flight;

Thus all the tribe of spirits, as they turn’d

Their visage, faster deaf, nimble alike

Through leanness and desire. And as a man,

Tir’d With the motion of a trotting steed,

Slacks pace, and stays behind his company,

Till his o’erbreathed lungs keep temperate time;

E’en so Forese let that holy crew

Proceed, behind them lingering at my side,

And saying: “When shall I again behold thee?”

“How long my life may last,” said I, “I know not;

This know, how soon soever I return,

My wishes will before me have arriv’d.

Sithence the place, where I am set to live,

Is, day by day, more scoop’d of all its good,

And dismal ruin seems to threaten it.”

“Go now,” he cried: “lo! he, whose guilt is most,

Passes before my vision, dragg’d at heels

Of an infuriate beast. Toward the vale,

Where guilt hath no redemption, on it speeds,

Each step increasing swiftness on the last;

Until a blow it strikes, that leaveth him

A corse most vilely shatter’d. No long space

Those wheels have yet to roll” (therewith his eyes

Look’d up to heav’n) “ere thou shalt plainly see

That which my words may not more plainly tell.

I quit thee: time is precious here: I lose

Too much, thus measuring my pace with shine.”

As from a troop of well-rank’d chivalry

One knight, more enterprising than the rest,

Pricks forth at gallop, eager to display

His prowess in the first encounter prov’d

So parted he from us with lengthen’d strides,

And left me on the way with those twain spirits,

Who were such mighty marshals of the world.

When he beyond us had so fled mine eyes

No nearer reach’d him, than my thought his words,

The branches of another fruit, thick hung,

And blooming fresh, appear’d. E’en as our steps

Turn’d thither, not far off it rose to view.

Beneath it were a multitude, that rais’d

Their hands, and shouted forth I know not What

Unto the boughs; like greedy and fond brats,

That beg, and answer none obtain from him,

Of whom they beg; but more to draw them on,

He at arm’s length the object of their wish

Above them holds aloft, and hides it not.
At length, as undeceiv’d they went their way:

And we approach the tree, who vows and tears

Sue to in vain, the mighty tree. “Pass on,

And come not near. Stands higher up the wood,

Whereof Eve tasted, and from it was ta’en

‘this plant.” Such sounds from midst the thickets came.

Whence I, with either bard, close to the side

That rose, pass’d forth beyond. “Remember,” next

We heard, “those noblest creatures of the clouds,

How they their twofold bosoms overgorg’d

Oppos’d in fight to Theseus: call to mind

The Hebrews, how effeminate they stoop’d

To ease their thirst; whence Gideon’s ranks were thinn’d,

As he to Midian march’d adown the hills.”

Thus near one border coasting, still we heard

The sins of gluttony, with woe erewhile

Reguerdon’d. Then along the lonely path,

Once more at large, full thousand paces on

We travel’d, each contemplative and mute.

“Why pensive journey thus ye three alone?”

Thus suddenly a voice exclaim’d: whereat

I shook, as doth a scar’d and paltry beast;

Then rais’d my head to look from whence it came.

Was ne’er, in furnace, glass, or metal seen

So bright and glowing red, as was the shape

I now beheld. “If ye desire to mount,”

He cried, “here must ye turn. This way he goes,

Who goes in quest of peace.” His countenance

Had dazzled me; and to my guides I fac’d

Backward, like one who walks, as sound directs.

As when, to harbinger the dawn, springs up

On freshen’d wing the air of May, and breathes

Of fragrance, all impregn’d with herb and flowers,

E’en such a wind I felt upon my front

Blow gently, and the moving of a wing

Perceiv’d, that moving shed ambrosial smell;

And then a voice: “Blessed are they, whom grace

Doth so illume, that appetite in them

Exhaleth no inordinate desire,

Still hung’ring as the rule of temperance wills.”

CANTO XXV

It was an hour, when he who climbs, had need

To walk uncrippled: for the sun had now

To Taurus the meridian circle left,

And to the Scorpion left the night. As one

That makes no pause, but presses on his road,

Whate’er betide him, if some urgent need

Impel: so enter’d we upon our way,

One before other; for, but singly, none

That steep and narrow scale admits to climb.

E’en as the young stork lifteth up his wing

Through wish to fly, yet ventures not to quit

The nest, and drops it; so in me desire

Of questioning my guide arose, and fell,

Arriving even to the act, that marks

A man prepar’d for speech. Him all our haste

Restrain’d not, but thus spake the sire belov’d:

“Fear not to speed the shaft, that on thy lip

Stands trembling for its flight.” Encourag’d thus

I straight began: “How there can leanness come,

Where is no want of nourishment to feed?”

“If thou,” he answer’d, “hadst remember’d thee,

How Meleager with the wasting brand

Wasted alike, by equal fires consum’d,

This would not trouble thee: and hadst thou thought,

How in the mirror your reflected form

With mimic motion vibrates, what now seems

Hard, had appear’d no harder than the pulp

Of summer fruit mature. But that thy will

In certainty may find its full repose,

Lo Statius here! on him I call, and pray

That he would now be healer of thy wound.”

“If in thy presence I unfold to him

The secrets of heaven’s vengeance, let me plead

Thine own injunction, to exculpate me.”

So Statius answer’d, and forthwith began:

“Attend my words, O son, and in thy mind

Receive them: so shall they be light to clear

The doubt thou offer’st. Blood, concocted well,

Which by the thirsty veins is ne’er imbib’d,

And rests as food superfluous, to be ta’en

From the replenish’d table, in the heart

Derives effectual virtue, that informs

The several human limbs, as being that,

Which passes through the veins itself to make them.

Yet more concocted it descends, where shame

Forbids to mention: and from thence distils

In natural vessel on another’s blood.

Then each unite together, one dispos’d

T’ endure, to act the other, through meet frame

Of its recipient mould: that being reach’d,

It ’gins to work, coagulating first;

Then vivifies what its own substance caus’d

To bear. With animation now indued,

The active virtue (differing from a plant

No further, than that this is on the way

And at its limit that) continues yet

To operate, that now it moves, and feels,

As sea sponge clinging to the rock: and there

Assumes th’ organic powers its seed convey’d.

‘This is the period, son! at which the virtue,

That from the generating heart proceeds,

Is pliant and expansive; for each limb

Is in the heart by forgeful nature plann’d.

How babe of animal becomes, remains

For thy consid’ring. At this point, more wise,

Than thou hast err’d, making the soul disjoin’d

From passive intellect, because he saw

No organ for the latter’s use assign’d.

“Open thy bosom to the truth that comes.

Know soon as in the embryo, to the brain,

Articulation is complete, then turns

The primal Mover with a smile of joy

On such great work of nature, and imbreathes

New spirit replete with virtue, that what here

Active it finds, to its own substance draws,

And forms an individual soul, that lives,

And feels, and bends reflective on itself.

And that thou less mayst marvel at the word,

Mark the sun’s heat, how that to wine doth change,

Mix’d with the moisture filter’d through the vine.

“When Lachesis hath spun the thread, the soul

Takes with her both the human and divine,

Memory, intelligence, and will, in act

Far keener than before, the other powers

Inactive all and mute. No pause allow’d,

In wond’rous sort self-moving, to one strand

Of those, where the departed roam, she falls,

Here learns her destin’d path. Soon as the place

Receives her, round the plastic virtue beams,

Distinct as in the living limbs before:

And as the air, when saturate with showers,

The casual beam refracting, decks itself

With many a hue; so here the ambient air

Weareth that form, which influence of the soul

Imprints on it; and like the flame, that where

The fire moves, thither follows, so henceforth

The new form on the spirit follows still:

Hence hath it semblance, and is shadow call’d,

With each sense even to the sight endued:

Hence speech is ours, hence laughter, tears, and sighs

Which thou mayst oft have witness’d on the mount

Th’ obedient shadow fails not to present

Whatever varying passion moves within us.

And this the cause of what thou marvel’st at.”
Now the last flexure of our way we reach’d,

And to the right hand turning, other care

Awaits us. Here the rocky precipice

Hurls forth redundant flames, and from the rim

A blast upblown, with forcible rebuff

Driveth them back, sequester’d from its bound.

Behoov’d us, one by one, along the side,

That border’d on the void, to pass; and I

Fear’d on one hand the fire, on th’ other fear’d

Headlong to fall: when thus th’ instructor warn’d:

“Strict rein must in this place direct the eyes.

A little swerving and the way is lost.”
Then from the bosom of the burning mass,

“O God of mercy!” heard I sung; and felt

No less desire to turn. And when I saw

Spirits along the flame proceeding, I

Between their footsteps and mine own was fain

To share by turns my view. At the hymn’s close

They shouted loud, “I do not know a man;”

Then in low voice again took up the strain,

Which once more ended, “To the wood,” they cried,

“Ran Dian, and drave forth Callisto, stung

With Cytherea’s poison:” then return’d

Unto their song; then marry a pair extoll’d,

Who liv’d in virtue chastely, and the bands

Of wedded love. Nor from that task, I ween,

Surcease they; whilesoe’er the scorching fire

Enclasps them. Of such skill appliance needs

To medicine the wound, that healeth last.

CANTO XXVI

While singly thus along the rim we walk’d,

Oft the good master warn’d me: “Look thou well.

Avail it that I caution thee.” The sun

Now all the western clime irradiate chang’d

From azure tinct to white; and, as I pass’d,

My passing shadow made the umber’d flame

Burn ruddier. At so strange a sight I mark’d

That many a spirit marvel’d on his way.

This bred occasion first to speak of me,

“He seems,” said they, “no insubstantial frame:”

Then to obtain what certainty they might,

Stretch’d towards me, careful not to overpass

The burning pale. “O thou, who followest

The others, haply not more slow than they,

But mov’d by rev’rence, answer me, who burn

In thirst and fire: nor I alone, but these

All for thine answer do more thirst, than doth

Indian or Aethiop for the cooling stream.

Tell us, how is it that thou mak’st thyself

A wall against the sun, as thou not yet

Into th’ inextricable toils of death

Hadst enter’d?” Thus spake one, and I had straight

Declar’d me, if attention had not turn’d

To new appearance. Meeting these, there came,

Midway the burning path, a crowd, on whom

Earnestly gazing, from each part I view

The shadows all press forward, sev’rally

Each snatch a hasty kiss, and then away.

E’en so the emmets, ’mid their dusky troops,

Peer closely one at other, to spy out

Their mutual road perchance, and how they thrive.

That friendly greeting parted, ere dispatch

Of the first onward step, from either tribe

Loud clamour rises: those, who newly come,

Shout “Sodom and Gomorrah!” these, “The cow

Pasiphae enter’d, that the beast she woo’d

Might rush unto her luxury.” Then as cranes,

That part towards the Riphaean mountains fly,

Part towards the Lybic sands, these to avoid

The ice, and those the sun; so hasteth off

One crowd, advances th’ other; and resume

Their first song weeping, and their several shout.

Again drew near my side the very same,

Who had erewhile besought me, and their looks

Mark’d eagerness to listen. I, who twice

Their will had noted, spake: “O spirits secure,

Whene’er the time may be, of peaceful end!

My limbs, nor crude, nor in mature old age,

Have I left yonder: here they bear me, fed

With blood, and sinew-strung. That I no more

May live in blindness, hence I tend aloft.

There is a dame on high, who wind for us

This grace, by which my mortal through your realm

I bear. But may your utmost wish soon meet

Such full fruition, that the orb of heaven,

Fullest of love, and of most ample space,

Receive you, as ye tell (upon my page

Henceforth to stand recorded) who ye are,

And what this multitude, that at your backs

Have past behind us." As one, mountain-bred,

Rugged and clownish, if some city's walls

He chance to enter, round him stares agape,

Confounded and struck dumb; e'en such appear'd

Each spirit. But when rid of that amaze,

(Not long the inmate of a noble heart)

He, who before had question'd, thus resum'd:

"O blessed, who, for death preparing, tak'st

Experience of our limits, in thy bark!

Their crime, who not with us proceed, was that,

For which, as he did triumph, Caesar heard

The snout of ‘queen,’ to taunt him. Hence their cry

Of ‘Sodom,’ as they parted, to rebuke

Themselves, and aid the burning by their shame.

Our sinning was Hermaphrodite: but we,

Because the law of human kind we broke,

Following like beasts our vile concupiscence,

Hence parting from them, to our own disgrace

Record the name of her, by whom the beast

In bestial tire was acted. Now our deeds

Thou know’st, and how we sinn’d. If thou by name

Wouldst haply know us, time permits not now

To tell so much, nor can I. Of myself

Learn what thou wishest. Guinicelli I,

Who having truly sorrow’d ere my last,

Already cleanse me.” With such pious joy,

As the two sons upon their mother gaz’d

From sad Lycurgus rescu’d, such my joy

(Save that I more represt it) when I heard

From his own lips the name of him pronounc’d,

Who was a father to me, and to those

My betters, who have ever us’d the sweet

And pleasant rhymes of love. So nought I heard

Nor spake, but long time thoughtfully I went,

Gazing on him; and, only for the fire,

Approach’d not nearer. When my eyes were fed

By looking on him, with such solemn pledge,

As forces credence, I devoted me

Unto his service wholly. In reply

He thus bespake me: “What from thee I hear

Is grav’d so deeply on my mind, the waves

Of Lethe shall not wash it off, nor make

A whit less lively. But as now thy oath

Has seal’d the truth, declare what cause impels

That love, which both thy looks and speech bewray.”

“Those dulcet lays,” I answer’d, “which, as long

As of our tongue the beauty does not fade,

Shall make us love the very ink that trac’d them.”

“Brother!” he cried, and pointed at a shade

Before him, “there is one, whose mother speech

Doth owe to him a fairer ornament.

He in love ditties and the tales of prose

Without a rival stands, and lets the fools

Talk on, who think the songster of Limoges

O’ertops him. Rumour and the popular voice

They look to more than truth, and so confirm

Opinion, ere by art or reason taught.

Thus many of the elder time cried up

Guittone, giving him the prize, till truth

By strength of numbers vanquish’d. If thou own

So ample privilege, as to have gain’d

Free entrance to the cloister, whereof Christ

Is Abbot of the college, say to him

One paternoster for me, far as needs

For dwellers in this world, where power to sin

No longer tempts us.” Haply to make way

For one, that follow’d next, when that was said,

He vanish’d through the fire, as through the wave

A fish, that glances diving to the deep.

I, to the spirit he had shown me, drew

A little onward, and besought his name,

For which my heart, I said, kept gracious room.

He frankly thus began: “Thy courtesy

So wins on me, I have nor power nor will

To hide me. I am Arnault; and with songs,

Sorely lamenting for my folly past,

Thorough this ford of fire I wade, and see

The day, I hope for, smiling in my view.

I pray ye by the worth that guides ye up

Unto the summit of the scale, in time

Remember ye my suff’rings.” With such words

He disappear’d in the refining flame.

CANTO XXVII

Now was the sun so station’d, as when first

His early radiance quivers on the heights,

Where stream’d his Maker’s blood, while Libra hangs

Above Hesperian Ebro, and new fires

Meridian flash on Ganges’ yellow tide.

So day was sinking, when the’ angel of God

Appear’d before us. Joy was in his mien.

Forth of the flame he stood upon the brink,

And with a voice, whose lively clearness far

Surpass’d our human, “Blessed are the pure

In heart,” he Sang: then near him as we came,

“Go ye not further, holy spirits!” he cried,

“Ere the fire pierce you: enter in; and list

Attentive to the song ye hear from thence.”

I, when I heard his saying, was as one

Laid in the grave. My hands together clasp’d,

And upward stretching, on the fire I look’d,

And busy fancy conjur’d up the forms

Erewhile beheld alive consum’d in flames.

Th’ escorting spirits turn’d with gentle looks

Toward me, and the Mantuan spake: “My son,

Here torment thou mayst feel, but canst not death.

Remember thee, remember thee, if I

Safe e’en on Geryon brought thee: now I come

More near to God, wilt thou not trust me now?

Of this be sure: though in its womb that flame

A thousand years contain’d thee, from thy head

No hair should perish. If thou doubt my truth,

Approach, and with thy hands thy vesture’s hem

Stretch forth, and for thyself confirm belief.

Lay now all fear, O lay all fear aside.

Turn hither, and come onward undismay’d.”

I still, though conscience urg’d’ no step advanc’d.

When still he saw me fix’d and obstinate,

Somewhat disturb’d he cried: “Mark now, my son,

From Beatrice thou art by this wall

Divided.” As at Thisbe’s name the eye

Of Pyramus was open’d (when life ebb’d

Fast from his veins), and took one parting glance,

While vermeil dyed the mulberry; thus I turn’d

To my sage guide, relenting, when I heard

The name, that springs forever in my breast.

He shook his forehead; and, “How long,” he said,

“Linger we now?” then smil’d, as one would smile

Upon a child, that eyes the fruit and yields.

Into the fire before me then he walk’d;

And Statius, who erewhile no little space

Had parted us, he pray’d to come behind.

I would have cast me into molten glass

To cool me, when I enter’d; so intense

Rag’d the conflagrant mass. The sire belov’d,

To comfort me, as he proceeded, still

Of Beatrice talk’d. “Her eyes,” saith he,

“E’en now I seem to view.” From the other side

A voice, that sang, did guide us, and the voice

Following, with heedful ear, we issued forth,

There where the path led upward. “Come,” we heard,

“Come, blessed of my Father.” Such the sounds,

That hail’d us from within a light, which shone

So radiant, I could not endure the view.

“The sun,” it added, “hastes: and evening comes.

Delay not: ere the western sky is hung

With blackness, strive ye for the pass.” Our way

Upright within the rock arose, and fac’d

Such part of heav’n, that from before my steps

The beams were shrouded of the sinking sun.

Nor many stairs were overpass, when now

By fading of the shadow we perceiv’d

The sun behind us couch’d: and ere one face

Of darkness o’er its measureless expanse

Involv’d th’ horizon, and the night her lot

Held individual, each of us had made

A stair his pallet: not that will, but power,

Had fail’d us, by the nature of that mount

Forbidden further travel. As the goats,

That late have skipp’d and wanton’d rapidly

Upon the craggy cliffs, ere they had ta’en

Their supper on the herb, now silent lie

And ruminate beneath the umbrage brown,

While noonday rages; and the goatherd leans

Upon his staff, and leaning watches them:

And as the swain, that lodges out all night

In quiet by his flock, lest beast of prey

Disperse them; even so all three abode,

I as a goat and as the shepherds they,

Close pent on either side by shelving rock.
A little glimpse of sky was seen above;

Yet by that little I beheld the stars

In magnitude and rustle shining forth

With more than wonted glory. As I lay,

Gazing on them, and in that fit of musing,

Sleep overcame me, sleep, that bringeth oft

Tidings of future hap. About the hour,

As I believe, when Venus from the east

First lighten’d on the mountain, she whose orb

Seems always glowing with the fire of love,

A lady young and beautiful, I dream’d,

Was passing o’er a lea; and, as she came,

Methought I saw her ever and anon

Bending to cull the flowers; and thus she sang:

“Know ye, whoever of my name would ask,

That I am Leah: for my brow to weave

A garland, these fair hands unwearied ply.

To please me at the crystal mirror, here

I deck me. But my sister Rachel, she

Before her glass abides the livelong day,

Her radiant eyes beholding, charm’d no less,

Than I with this delightful task. Her joy

In contemplation, as in labour mine.”

And now as glimm’ring dawn appear’d, that breaks

More welcome to the pilgrim still, as he

Sojourns less distant on his homeward way,

Darkness from all sides fled, and with it fled

My slumber; whence I rose and saw my guide

Already risen. “That delicious fruit,

Which through so many a branch the zealous care

Of mortals roams in quest of, shall this day

Appease thy hunger.” Such the words I heard

From Virgil’s lip; and never greeting heard

So pleasant as the sounds. Within me straight

Desire so grew upon desire to mount,

Thenceforward at each step I felt the wings

Increasing for my flight. When we had run

O’er all the ladder to its topmost round,

As there we stood, on me the Mantuan fix’d

His eyes, and thus he spake: “Both fires, my son,

The temporal and eternal, thou hast seen,

And art arriv’d, where of itself my ken

No further reaches. I with skill and art

Thus far have drawn thee. Now thy pleasure take

For guide. Thou hast o’ercome the steeper way,

O’ercome the straighter. Lo! the sun, that darts

His beam upon thy forehead! lo! the herb,

The arboreta and flowers, which of itself

This land pours forth profuse! Till those bright eyes

With gladness come, which, weeping, made me haste

To succour thee, thou mayst or seat thee down,

Or wander where thou wilt. Expect no more

Sanction of warning voice or sign from me,

Free of thy own arbitrement to choose,

Discreet, judicious. To distrust thy sense

Were henceforth error. I invest thee then

With crown and mitre, sovereign o’er thyself.”

CANTO XXVIII

Through that celestial forest, whose thick shade

With lively greenness the new-springing day

Attemper’d, eager now to roam, and search

Its limits round, forthwith I left the bank,

Along the champain leisurely my way

Pursuing, o’er the ground, that on all sides

Delicious odour breath’d. A pleasant air,

That intermitted never, never veer’d,

Smote on my temples, gently, as a wind

Of softest influence: at which the sprays,

Obedient all, lean’d trembling to that part

Where first the holy mountain casts his shade,

Yet were not so disorder’d, but that still

Upon their top the feather’d quiristers

Applied their wonted art, and with full joy

Welcom’d those hours of prime, and warbled shrill

Amid the leaves, that to their jocund lays

inept tenor; even as from branch to branch,

Along the piney forests on the shore

Of Chiassi, rolls the gath’ring melody,

When Eolus hath from his cavern loos’d

The dripping south. Already had my steps,

Though slow, so far into that ancient wood

Transported me, I could not ken the place

Where I had enter’d, when behold! my path

Was bounded by a rill, which to the left

With little rippling waters bent the grass,

That issued from its brink. On earth no wave

How clean soe’er, that would not seem to have

Some mixture in itself, compar’d with this,

Transpicuous, clear; yet darkly on it roll’d,

Darkly beneath perpetual gloom, which ne’er

Admits or sun or moon light there to shine.
My feet advanc’d not; but my wond’ring eyes

Pass’d onward, o’er the streamlet, to survey

The tender May-bloom, flush’d through many a hue,

In prodigal variety: and there,

As object, rising suddenly to view,

That from our bosom every thought beside

With the rare marvel chases, I beheld

A lady all alone, who, singing, went,

And culling flower from flower, wherewith her way

Was all o’er painted. “Lady beautiful!

Thou, who (if looks, that use to speak the heart,

Are worthy of our trust), with love’s own beam

Dost warm thee,” thus to her my speech I fram’d:

“Ah! please thee hither towards the streamlet bend

Thy steps so near, that I may list thy song.

Beholding thee and this fair place, methinks,

I call to mind where wander’d and how look’d

Proserpine, in that season, when her child

The mother lost, and she the bloomy spring.”

As when a lady, turning in the dance,

Doth foot it featly, and advances scarce

One step before the other to the ground;

Over the yellow and vermilion flowers

Thus turn’d she at my suit, most maiden-like,

Valing her sober eyes, and came so near,

That I distinctly caught the dulcet sound.

Arriving where the limped waters now

Lav’d the green sward, her eyes she deign’d to raise,

That shot such splendour on me, as I ween

Ne’er glanced from Cytherea’s, when her son

Had sped his keenest weapon to her heart.

Upon the opposite bank she stood and smil’d

through her graceful fingers shifted still

The intermingling dyes, which without seed

That lofty land unbosoms. By the stream

Three paces only were we sunder’d: yet

The Hellespont, where Xerxes pass’d it o’er,

(A curb for ever to the pride of man)

Was by Leander not more hateful held

For floating, with inhospitable wave

’Twixt Sestus and Abydos, than by me

That flood, because it gave no passage thence.

“Strangers ye come, and haply in this place,

That cradled human nature in its birth,

Wond’ring, ye not without suspicion view

My smiles: but that sweet strain of psalmody,

‘Thou, Lord! hast made me glad,’ will give ye light,

Which may uncloud your minds. And thou, who stand’st

The foremost, and didst make thy suit to me,

Say if aught else thou wish to hear: for I

Came prompt to answer every doubt of thine.”

She spake; and I replied: “I know not how

To reconcile this wave and rustling sound

Of forest leaves, with what I late have heard

Of opposite report.” She answering thus:

“I will unfold the cause, whence that proceeds,

Which makes thee wonder; and so purge the cloud

That hath enwraps thee. The First Good, whose joy

Is only in himself, created man

For happiness, and gave this goodly place,

His pledge and earnest of eternal peace.

Favour’d thus highly, through his own defect

He fell, and here made short sojourn; he fell,

And, for the bitterness of sorrow, chang’d

Laughter unblam’d and ever-new delight.

That vapours none, exhal’d from earth beneath,

Or from the waters (which, wherever heat

Attracts them, follow), might ascend thus far

To vex man’s peaceful state, this mountain rose

So high toward the heav’n, nor fears the rage

Of elements contending, from that part

Exempted, where the gate his limit bars.

Because the circumambient air throughout

With its first impulse circles still, unless

Aught interpose to cheek or thwart its course;

Upon the summit, which on every side

To visitation of th’ impassive air

Is open, doth that motion strike, and makes

Beneath its sway th’ umbrageous wood resound:

And in the shaken plant such power resides,

That it impregnates with its efficacy

The voyaging breeze, upon whose subtle plume

That wafted flies abroad; and th’ other land

Receiving (as ’t is worthy in itself,

Or in the clime, that warms it), doth conceive,

And from its womb produces many a tree

Of various virtue. This when thou hast heard,

The marvel ceases, if in yonder earth

Some plant without apparent seed be found

To fix its fibrous stem. And further learn,

That with prolific foison of all seeds,

This holy plain is fill’d, and in itself

Bears fruit that ne’er was pluck’d on other soil.

The water, thou behold’st, springs not from vein,

As stream, that intermittently repairs

And spends his pulse of life, but issues forth

From fountain, solid, undecaying, sure;

And by the will omnific, full supply

Feeds whatsoe’er On either side it pours;

On this devolv’d with power to take away

Remembrance of offence, on that to bring

Remembrance back of every good deed done.

From whence its name of Lethe on this part;

On th’ other Eunoe: both of which must first

Be tasted ere it work; the last exceeding

All flavours else. Albeit thy thirst may now

Be well contented, if I here break off,

No more revealing: yet a corollary

I freely give beside: nor deem my words

Less grateful to thee, if they somewhat pass

The stretch of promise. They, whose verse of yore

The golden age recorded and its bliss,

On the Parnassian mountain, of this place

Perhaps had dream’d. Here was man guiltless, here

Perpetual spring and every fruit, and this

The far-fam’d nectar.” Turning to the bards,

When she had ceas’d, I noted in their looks

A smile at her conclusion; then my face

Again directed to the lovely dame.

CANTO XXIX

Singing, as if enamour’d, she resum’d

And clos’d the song, with “Blessed they whose sins

Are cover’d.” Like the wood-nymphs then, that tripp’d

Singly across the sylvan shadows, one

Eager to view and one to ’scape the sun,

So mov’d she on, against the current, up

The verdant rivage. I, her mincing step

Observing, with as tardy step pursued.

Between us not an hundred paces trod,

The bank, on each side bending equally,

Gave me to face the orient. Nor our way

Far onward brought us, when to me at once

She turn’d, and cried: “My brother! look and hearken.”

And lo! a sudden lustre ran across

Through the great forest on all parts, so bright

I doubted whether lightning were abroad;

But that expiring ever in the spleen,

That doth unfold it, and this during still

And waxing still in splendor, made me question

What it might be: and a sweet melody

Ran through the luminous air. Then did I chide

With warrantable zeal the hardihood

Of our first parent, for that there were earth

Stood in obedience to the heav’ns, she only,

Woman, the creature of an hour, endur’d not

Restraint of any veil: which had she borne

Devoutly, joys, ineffable as these,

Had from the first, and long time since, been mine.

While through that wilderness of primy sweets

That never fade, suspense I walk’d, and yet

Expectant of beatitude more high,

Before us, like a blazing fire, the air

Under the green boughs glow’d; and, for a song,

Distinct the sound of melody was heard.

O ye thrice holy virgins! for your sakes

If e’er I suffer’d hunger, cold and watching,

Occasion calls on me to crave your bounty.

Now through my breast let Helicon his stream

Pour copious; and Urania with her choir

Arise to aid me: while the verse unfolds

Things that do almost mock the grasp of thought.

Onward a space, what seem’d seven trees of gold,

The intervening distance to mine eye

Falsely presented; but when I was come

So near them, that no lineament was lost

Of those, with which a doubtful object, seen

Remotely, plays on the misdeeming sense,

Then did the faculty, that ministers

Discourse to reason, these for tapers of gold

Distinguish, and it th’ singing trace the sound

“Hosanna.” Above, their beauteous garniture

Flam’d with more ample lustre, than the moon

Through cloudless sky at midnight in her full.

I turn’d me full of wonder to my guide;

And he did answer with a countenance

Charg’d with no less amazement: whence my view

Reverted to those lofty things, which came

So slowly moving towards us, that the bride

Would have outstript them on her bridal day.

The lady called aloud: “Why thus yet burns

Affection in thee for these living, lights,

And dost not look on that which follows them?”

I straightway mark’d a tribe behind them walk,

As if attendant on their leaders, cloth’d

With raiment of such whiteness, as on earth

Was never. On my left, the wat’ry gleam

Borrow’d, and gave me back, when there I look’d.

As in a mirror, my left side portray’d.

When I had chosen on the river’s edge

Such station, that the distance of the stream

Alone did separate me; there I stay’d

My steps for clearer prospect, and beheld

The flames go onward, leaving, as they went,

The air behind them painted as with trail

Of liveliest pencils! so distinct were mark’d

All those sev’n listed colours, whence the sun

Maketh his bow, and Cynthia her zone.

These streaming gonfalons did flow beyond

My vision; and ten paces, as I guess,

Parted the outermost. Beneath a sky

So beautiful, came foul and-twenty elders,

By two and two, with flower-de-luces crown’d.
All sang one song: “Blessed be thou among

The daughters of Adam! and thy loveliness

Blessed for ever!” After that the flowers,

And the fresh herblets, on the opposite brink,

Were free from that elected race; as light

In heav’n doth second light, came after them

Four animals, each crown’d with verdurous leaf.

With six wings each was plum’d, the plumage full

Of eyes, and th’ eyes of Argus would be such,

Were they endued with life. Reader, more rhymes

Will not waste in shadowing forth their form:

For other need no straitens, that in this

I may not give my bounty room. But read

Ezekiel; for he paints them, from the north

How he beheld them come by Chebar’s flood,

In whirlwind, cloud and fire; and even such

As thou shalt find them character’d by him,

Here were they; save as to the pennons; there,

From him departing, John accords with me.

The space, surrounded by the four, enclos’d

A car triumphal: on two wheels it came

Drawn at a Gryphon’s neck; and he above

Stretch’d either wing uplifted, ’tween the midst

And the three listed hues, on each side three;

So that the wings did cleave or injure none;

And out of sight they rose. The members, far

As he was bird, were golden; white the rest

With vermeil intervein’d. So beautiful

A car in Rome ne’er grac’d Augustus pomp,

Or Africanus’: e’en the sun’s itself

Were poor to this, that chariot of the sun

Erroneous, which in blazing ruin fell

At Tellus’ pray’r devout, by the just doom

Mysterious of all-seeing Jove. Three nymphs

at the right wheel, came circling in smooth dance;

The one so ruddy, that her form had scarce

Been known within a furnace of clear flame:

The next did look, as if the flesh and bones

Were emerald: snow new-fallen seem’d the third.
Now seem’d the white to lead, the ruddy now;

And from her song who led, the others took

Their treasure, swift or slow. At th’ other wheel,

A band quaternion, each in purple clad,

Advanc’d with festal step, as of them one

The rest conducted, one, upon whose front

Three eyes were seen. In rear of all this group,

Two old men I beheld, dissimilar

In raiment, but in port and gesture like,

Solid and mainly grave; of whom the one

Did show himself some favour’d counsellor

Of the great Coan, him, whom nature made

To serve the costliest creature of her tribe.

His fellow mark’d an opposite intent,

Bearing a sword, whose glitterance and keen edge,

E’en as I view’d it with the flood between,

Appall’d me. Next four others I beheld,

Of humble seeming: and, behind them all,

One single old man, sleeping, as he came,

With a shrewd visage. And these seven, each

Like the first troop were habited, but wore

No braid of lilies on their temples wreath’d.

Rather with roses and each vermeil flower,

A sight, but little distant, might have sworn,

That they were all on fire above their brow.

Whenas the car was o’er against me, straight.

Was heard a thund’ring, at whose voice it seem’d

The chosen multitude were stay’d; for there,

With the first ensigns, made they solemn halt.

CANTO XXX

Soon as the polar light, which never knows

Setting nor rising, nor the shadowy veil

Of other cloud than sin, fair ornament

Of the first heav’n, to duty each one there

Safely convoying, as that lower doth

The steersman to his port, stood firmly fix’d;

Forthwith the saintly tribe, who in the van

Between the Gryphon and its radiance came,

Did turn them to the car, as to their rest:

And one, as if commission’d from above,

In holy chant thrice shorted forth aloud:

“Come, spouse, from Libanus!” and all the rest

Took up the song—At the last audit so

The blest shall rise, from forth his cavern each

Uplifting lightly his new-vested flesh,

As, on the sacred litter, at the voice

Authoritative of that elder, sprang

A hundred ministers and messengers

Of life eternal. “Blessed thou! who com’st!”

And, “O,” they cried, “from full hands scatter ye

Unwith’ring lilies;” and, so saying, cast

Flowers over head and round them on all sides.

I have beheld, ere now, at break of day,

The eastern clime all roseate, and the sky

Oppos’d, one deep and beautiful serene,

And the sun’s face so shaded, and with mists

Attemper’d at lids rising, that the eye

Long while endur’d the sight: thus in a cloud

Of flowers, that from those hands angelic rose,

And down, within and outside of the car,

Fell showering, in white veil with olive wreath’d,

A virgin in my view appear’d, beneath

Green mantle, rob’d in hue of living flame:
And o’er my Spirit, that in former days

Within her presence had abode so long,

No shudd’ring terror crept. Mine eyes no more

Had knowledge of her; yet there mov’d from her

A hidden virtue, at whose touch awak’d,

The power of ancient love was strong within me.

No sooner on my vision streaming, smote

The heav’nly influence, which years past, and e’en

In childhood, thrill’d me, than towards Virgil I

Turn’d me to leftward, panting, like a babe,

That flees for refuge to his mother’s breast,

If aught have terrified or work’d him woe:

And would have cried: “There is no dram of blood,

That doth not quiver in me. The old flame

Throws out clear tokens of reviving fire:”

But Virgil had bereav’d us of himself,

Virgil, my best-lov’d father; Virgil, he

To whom I gave me up for safety: nor,

All, our prime mother lost, avail’d to save

My undew’d cheeks from blur of soiling tears.

“Dante, weep not, that Virgil leaves thee: nay,

Weep thou not yet: behooves thee feel the edge

Of other sword, and thou shalt weep for that.”

As to the prow or stern, some admiral

Paces the deck, inspiriting his crew,

When ’mid the sail-yards all hands ply aloof;

Thus on the left side of the car I saw,

(Turning me at the sound of mine own name,

Which here I am compell’d to register)

The virgin station’d, who before appeared

Veil’d in that festive shower angelical.

Towards me, across the stream, she bent her eyes;

Though from her brow the veil descending, bound

With foliage of Minerva, suffer’d not

That I beheld her clearly; then with act

Full royal, still insulting o’er her thrall,

Added, as one, who speaking keepeth back

The bitterest saying, to conclude the speech:

“Observe me well. I am, in sooth, I am

Beatrice. What! and hast thou deign’d at last

Approach the mountain? knewest not, O man!

Thy happiness is whole?” Down fell mine eyes

On the clear fount, but there, myself espying,

Recoil’d, and sought the greensward: such a weight

Of shame was on my forehead. With a mien

Of that stern majesty, which doth surround

mother’s presence to her awe-struck child,

She look’d; a flavour of such bitterness

Was mingled in her pity. There her words

Brake off, and suddenly the angels sang:

“In thee, O gracious Lord, my hope hath been:”

But went no farther than, “Thou Lord, hast set

My feet in ample room.” As snow, that lies

Amidst the living rafters on the back

Of Italy congeal’d when drifted high

And closely pil’d by rough Sclavonian blasts,

Breathe but the land whereon no shadow falls,

And straightway melting it distils away,

Like a fire-wasted taper: thus was I,

Without a sigh or tear, or ever these

Did sing, that with the chiming of heav’n’s sphere,

Still in their warbling chime: but when the strain

Of dulcet symphony, express’d for me

Their soft compassion, more than could the words

“Virgin, why so consum’st him?” then the ice,

Congeal’d about my bosom, turn’d itself

To spirit and water, and with anguish forth

Gush’d through the lips and eyelids from the heart.

Upon the chariot’s right edge still she stood,

Immovable, and thus address’d her words

To those bright semblances with pity touch’d:

“Ye in th’ eternal day your vigils keep,

So that nor night nor slumber, with close stealth,

Conveys from you a single step in all

The goings on of life: thence with more heed

I shape mine answer, for his ear intended,

Who there stands weeping, that the sorrow now

May equal the transgression. Not alone

Through operation of the mighty orbs,

That mark each seed to some predestin’d aim,

As with aspect or fortunate or ill

The constellations meet, but through benign

Largess of heav’nly graces, which rain down

From such a height, as mocks our vision, this man

Was in the freshness of his being, such,

So gifted virtually, that in him

All better habits wond’rously had thriv’d.

The more of kindly strength is in the soil,

So much doth evil seed and lack of culture

Mar it the more, and make it run to wildness.

These looks sometime upheld him; for I show’d

My youthful eyes, and led him by their light

In upright walking. Soon as I had reach’d

The threshold of my second age, and chang’d

My mortal for immortal, then he left me,

And gave himself to others. When from flesh

To spirit I had risen, and increase

Of beauty and of virtue circled me,

I was less dear to him, and valued less.

His steps were turn’d into deceitful ways,

Following false images of good, that make

No promise perfect. Nor avail’d me aught

To sue for inspirations, with the which,

I, both in dreams of night, and otherwise,

Did call him back; of them so little reck’d him,

Such depth he fell, that all device was short

Of his preserving, save that he should view

The children of perdition. To this end

I visited the purlieus of the dead:

And one, who hath conducted him thus high,

Receiv’d my supplications urg’d with weeping.

It were a breaking of God’s high decree,

If Lethe should be past, and such food tasted

Without the cost of some repentant tear.”

CANTO XXXI

“O Thou!” her words she thus without delay

Resuming, turn’d their point on me, to whom

They but with lateral edge seem’d harsh before,

“Say thou, who stand’st beyond the holy stream,

If this be true. A charge so grievous needs

Thine own avowal.” On my faculty

Such strange amazement hung, the voice expir’d

Imperfect, ere its organs gave it birth.

A little space refraining, then she spake:

“What dost thou muse on? Answer me. The wave

On thy remembrances of evil yet

Hath done no injury.” A mingled sense

Of fear and of confusion, from my lips

Did such a “Yea” produce, as needed help

Of vision to interpret. As when breaks

In act to be discharg’d, a cross-bow bent

Beyond its pitch, both nerve and bow o’erstretch’d,

The flagging weapon feebly hits the mark;

Thus, tears and sighs forth gushing, did I burst

Beneath the heavy load, and thus my voice

Was slacken’d on its way. She straight began:

“When my desire invited thee to love

The good, which sets a bound to our aspirings,

What bar of thwarting foss or linked chain

Did meet thee, that thou so should’st quit the hope

Of further progress, or what bait of ease

Or promise of allurement led thee on

Elsewhere, that thou elsewhere should’st rather wait?”

A bitter sigh I drew, then scarce found voice

To answer, hardly to these sounds my lips

Gave utterance, wailing: “Thy fair looks withdrawn,

Things present, with deceitful pleasures, turn’d

My steps aside.” She answering spake: “Hadst thou

Been silent, or denied what thou avow’st,

Thou hadst not hid thy sin the more: such eye

Observes it. But whene’er the sinner’s cheek

Breaks forth into the precious-streaming tears

Of self-accusing, in our court the wheel

Of justice doth run counter to the edge.

Howe’er that thou may’st profit by thy shame

For errors past, and that henceforth more strength

May arm thee, when thou hear’st the Siren-voice,

Lay thou aside the motive to this grief,

And lend attentive ear, while I unfold

How opposite a way my buried flesh

Should have impell’d thee. Never didst thou spy

In art or nature aught so passing sweet,

As were the limbs, that in their beauteous frame

Enclos’d me, and are scatter’d now in dust.

If sweetest thing thus fail’d thee with my death,

What, afterward, of mortal should thy wish

Have tempted? When thou first hadst felt the dart

Of perishable things, in my departing

For better realms, thy wing thou should’st have prun’d

To follow me, and never stoop’d again

To ’bide a second blow for a slight girl,

Or other gaud as transient and as vain.

The new and inexperienc’d bird awaits,

Twice it may be, or thrice, the fowler’s aim;

But in the sight of one, whose plumes are full,

In vain the net is spread, the arrow wing’d.”

I stood, as children silent and asham’d

Stand, list’ning, with their eyes upon the earth,

Acknowledging their fault and self-condemn’d.

And she resum’d: “If, but to hear thus pains thee,

Raise thou thy beard, and lo! what sight shall do!”

With less reluctance yields a sturdy holm,

Rent from its fibers by a blast, that blows

From off the pole, or from Iarbas' land,

Than I at her behest my visage rais'd:

And thus the face denoting by the beard,

I mark'd the secret sting her words convey'd.

No sooner lifted I mine aspect up,

Than downward sunk that vision I beheld

Of goodly creatures vanish; and mine eyes

Yet unassur'd and wavering, bent their light

On Beatrice. Towards the animal,

Who joins two natures in one form, she turn'd,

And, even under shadow of her veil,

And parted by the verdant rill, that flow'd

Between, in loveliness appear'd as much

Her former self surpassing, as on earth

All others she surpass’d. Remorseful goads

Shot sudden through me. Each thing else, the more

Its love had late beguil’d me, now the more

I Was loathsome. On my heart so keenly smote

The bitter consciousness, that on the ground

O’erpower’d I fell: and what my state was then,

She knows who was the cause. When now my strength

Flow’d back, returning outward from the heart,

The lady, whom alone I first had seen,

I found above me. “Loose me not,” she cried:

“Loose not thy hold;” and lo! had dragg’d me high

As to my neck into the stream, while she,

Still as she drew me after, swept along,

Swift as a shuttle, bounding o’er the wave.
The blessed shore approaching then was heard

So sweetly, “Tu asperges me,” that I

May not remember, much less tell the sound.

The beauteous dame, her arms expanding, clasp’d

My temples, and immerg’d me, where ’t was fit

The wave should drench me: and thence raising up,

Within the fourfold dance of lovely nymphs

Presented me so lav’d, and with their arm

They each did cover me. “Here are we nymphs,

And in the heav’n are stars. Or ever earth

Was visited of Beatrice, we

Appointed for her handmaids, tended on her.

We to her eyes will lead thee; but the light

Of gladness that is in them, well to scan,

Those yonder three, of deeper ken than ours,

Thy sight shall quicken.” Thus began their song;

And then they led me to the Gryphon’s breast,

While, turn’d toward us, Beatrice stood.

“Spare not thy vision. We have stationed thee

Before the emeralds, whence love erewhile

Hath drawn his weapons on thee.” As they spake,

A thousand fervent wishes riveted

Mine eyes upon her beaming eyes, that stood

Still fix’d toward the Gryphon motionless.

As the sun strikes a mirror, even thus

Within those orbs the twofold being, shone,

For ever varying, in one figure now

Reflected, now in other. Reader! muse

How wond’rous in my sight it seem’d to mark

A thing, albeit steadfast in itself,

Yet in its imag’d semblance mutable.

Full of amaze, and joyous, while my soul

Fed on the viand, whereof still desire

Grows with satiety, the other three

With gesture, that declar’d a loftier line,

Advanc’d: to their own carol on they came

Dancing in festive ring angelical.

“Turn, Beatrice!” was their song: “O turn

Thy saintly sight on this thy faithful one,

Who to behold thee many a wearisome pace

Hath measur’d. Gracious at our pray’r vouchsafe

Unveil to him thy cheeks: that he may mark

Thy second beauty, now conceal’d.” O splendour!

O sacred light eternal! who is he

So pale with musing in Pierian shades,

Or with that fount so lavishly imbued,

Whose spirit should not fail him in th’ essay

To represent thee such as thou didst seem,

When under cope of the still-chiming heaven

Thou gav’st to open air thy charms reveal’d.

CANTO XXXII

Mine eyes with such an eager coveting,

Were bent to rid them of their ten years’ thirst,

No other sense was waking: and e’en they

Were fenc’d on either side from heed of aught;

So tangled in its custom’d toils that smile

Of saintly brightness drew me to itself,

When forcibly toward the left my sight

The sacred virgins turn’d; for from their lips

I heard the warning sounds: “Too fix’d a gaze!”

Awhile my vision labor’d; as when late

Upon the’ o’erstrained eyes the sun hath smote:

But soon to lesser object, as the view

Was now recover’d (lesser in respect

To that excess of sensible, whence late

I had perforce been sunder’d) on their right

I mark’d that glorious army wheel, and turn,

Against the sun and sev’nfold lights, their front.

As when, their bucklers for protection rais’d,

A well-rang’d troop, with portly banners curl’d,

Wheel circling, ere the whole can change their ground:

E’en thus the goodly regiment of heav’n

Proceeding, all did pass us, ere the car

Had slop’d his beam. Attendant at the wheels

The damsels turn’d; and on the Gryphon mov’d

The sacred burden, with a pace so smooth,

No feather on him trembled. The fair dame

Who through the wave had drawn me, companied

By Statius and myself, pursued the wheel,

Whose orbit, rolling, mark’d a lesser arch.

Through the high wood, now void (the more her blame,

Who by the serpent was beguil’d) I past

With step in cadence to the harmony

Angelic. Onward had we mov’d, as far

Perchance as arrow at three several flights

Full wing’d had sped, when from her station down

Descended Beatrice. With one voice

All murmur’d “Adam,” circling next a plant

Despoil’d of flowers and leaf on every bough.

Its tresses, spreading more as more they rose,

Were such, as ’midst their forest wilds for height

The Indians might have gaz’d at. “Blessed thou!

Gryphon, whose beak hath never pluck’d that tree

Pleasant to taste: for hence the appetite

Was warp’d to evil.” Round the stately trunk

Thus shouted forth the rest, to whom return’d

The animal twice-gender’d: “Yea: for so

The generation of the just are sav’d.”

And turning to the chariot-pole, to foot

He drew it of the widow’d branch, and bound

There left unto the stock whereon it grew.

As when large floods of radiance from above

Stream, with that radiance mingled, which ascends

Next after setting of the scaly sign,

Our plants then burgeon, and each wears anew

His wonted colours, ere the sun have yok’d

Beneath another star his flamy steeds;

Thus putting forth a hue, more faint than rose,

And deeper than the violet, was renew’d

The plant, erewhile in all its branches bare.

Unearthly was the hymn, which then arose.

I understood it not, nor to the end

Endur’d the harmony. Had I the skill

To pencil forth, how clos’d th’ unpitying eyes

Slumb’ring, when Syrinx warbled, (eyes that paid

So dearly for their watching,) then like painter,

That with a model paints, I might design

The manner of my falling into sleep.

But feign who will the slumber cunningly;

I pass it by to when I wak’d, and tell

How suddenly a flash of splendour rent

The curtain of my sleep, and one cries out:

“Arise, what dost thou?” As the chosen three,

On Tabor’s mount, admitted to behold

The blossoming of that fair tree, whose fruit

Is coveted of angels, and doth make

Perpetual feast in heaven, to themselves

Returning at the word, whence deeper sleeps

Were broken, that they their tribe diminish’d saw,

Both Moses and Elias gone, and chang’d

The stole their master wore: thus to myself

Returning, over me beheld I stand

The piteous one, who cross the stream had brought

My steps. “And where,” all doubting, I exclaim’d,

“Is Beatrice?”—“See her,” she replied,

“Beneath the fresh leaf seated on its root.

Behold th’ associate choir that circles her.

The others, with a melody more sweet

And more profound, journeying to higher realms,

Upon the Gryphon tend.” If there her words

Were clos’d, I know not; but mine eyes had now

Ta’en view of her, by whom all other thoughts

Were barr’d admittance. On the very ground

Alone she sat, as she had there been left

A guard upon the wain, which I beheld

Bound to the twyform beast. The seven nymphs

Did make themselves a cloister round about her,

And in their hands upheld those lights secure

From blast septentrion and the gusty south.

“A little while thou shalt be forester here:

And citizen shalt be forever with me,

Of that true Rome, wherein Christ dwells a Roman

To profit the misguided world, keep now

Thine eyes upon the car; and what thou seest,

Take heed thou write, returning to that place.”

Thus Beatrice: at whose feet inclin’d

Devout, at her behest, my thought and eyes,

I, as she bade, directed. Never fire,

With so swift motion, forth a stormy cloud

Leap’d downward from the welkin’s farthest bound,

As I beheld the bird of Jove descending

Pounce on the tree, and, as he rush’d, the rind,

Disparting crush beneath him, buds much more

And leaflets. On the car with all his might

He struck, whence, staggering like a ship, it reel’d,

At random driv’n, to starboard now, o’ercome,

And now to larboard, by the vaulting waves.

Next springing up into the chariot’s womb

A fox I saw, with hunger seeming pin’d

Of all good food. But, for his ugly sins

The saintly maid rebuking him, away

Scamp’ring he turn’d, fast as his hide-bound corpse

Would bear him. Next, from whence before he came,

I saw the eagle dart into the hull

O’ th’ car, and leave it with his feathers lin’d;

And then a voice, like that which issues forth

From heart with sorrow riv’d, did issue forth

From heav’n, and, “O poor bark of mine!” it cried,

“How badly art thou freighted!” Then, it seem’d,

That the earth open’d between either wheel,

And I beheld a dragon issue thence,

That through the chariot fix’d his forked train;

And like a wasp that draggeth back the sting,

So drawing forth his baleful train, he dragg’d

Part of the bottom forth, and went his way

Exulting. What remain’d, as lively turf

With green herb, so did clothe itself with plumes,

Which haply had with purpose chaste and kind

Been offer’d; and therewith were cloth’d the wheels,

Both one and other, and the beam, so quickly

A sigh were not breath’d sooner. Thus transform’d,

The holy structure, through its several parts,

Did put forth heads, three on the beam, and one

On every side; the first like oxen horn’d,

But with a single horn upon their front

The four. Like monster sight hath never seen.

O’er it methought there sat, secure as rock

On mountain’s lofty top, a shameless whore,

Whose ken rov’d loosely round her. At her side,

As ’t were that none might bear her off, I saw

A giant stand; and ever, and anon

They mingled kisses. But, her lustful eyes

Chancing on me to wander, that fell minion

Scourg’d her from head to foot all o’er; then full

Of jealousy, and fierce with rage, unloos’d

The monster, and dragg’d on, so far across

The forest, that from me its shades alone

Shielded the harlot and the new-form’d brute.

CANTO XXXIII

“The heathen, Lord! are come!” responsive thus,

The trinal now, and now the virgin band

Quaternion, their sweet psalmody began,

Weeping; and Beatrice listen’d, sad

And sighing, to the song’, in such a mood,

That Mary, as she stood beside the cross,

Was scarce more chang’d. But when they gave her place

To speak, then, risen upright on her feet,

She, with a colour glowing bright as fire,

Did answer: “Yet a little while, and ye

Shall see me not; and, my beloved sisters,

Again a little while, and ye shall see me.”

Before her then she marshall’d all the seven,

And, beck’ning only motion’d me, the dame,

And that remaining sage, to follow her.

So on she pass’d; and had not set, I ween,

Her tenth step to the ground, when with mine eyes

Her eyes encounter’d; and, with visage mild,

“So mend thy pace,” she cried, “that if my words

Address thee, thou mayst still be aptly plac’d

To hear them.” Soon as duly to her side

I now had hasten’d: “Brother!” she began,

“Why mak’st thou no attempt at questioning,

As thus we walk together?” Like to those

Who, speaking with too reverent an awe

Before their betters, draw not forth the voice

Alive unto their lips, befell me shell

That I in sounds imperfect thus began:

“Lady! what I have need of, that thou know’st,

And what will suit my need.” She answering thus:

“Of fearfulness and shame, I will, that thou

Henceforth do rid thee: that thou speak no more,

As one who dreams. Thus far be taught of me:

The vessel, which thou saw’st the serpent break,

Was and is not: let him, who hath the blame,

Hope not to scare God’s vengeance with a sop.

Without an heir for ever shall not be

That eagle, he, who left the chariot plum’d,

Which monster made it first and next a prey.

Plainly I view, and therefore speak, the stars

E’en now approaching, whose conjunction, free

From all impediment and bar, brings on

A season, in the which, one sent from God,

(Five hundred, five, and ten, do mark him out)

That foul one, and th’ accomplice of her guilt,

The giant, both shall slay. And if perchance

My saying, dark as Themis or as Sphinx,

Fail to persuade thee, (since like them it foils

The intellect with blindness) yet ere long

Events shall be the Naiads, that will solve

This knotty riddle, and no damage light

On flock or field. Take heed; and as these words

By me are utter’d, teach them even so

To those who live that life, which is a race

To death: and when thou writ’st them, keep in mind

Not to conceal how thou hast seen the plant,

That twice hath now been spoil’d. This whoso robs,

This whoso plucks, with blasphemy of deed

Sins against God, who for his use alone

Creating hallow’d it. For taste of this,

In pain and in desire, five thousand years

And upward, the first soul did yearn for him,

Who punish’d in himself the fatal gust.

“Thy reason slumbers, if it deem this height

And summit thus inverted of the plant,

Without due cause: and were not vainer thoughts,

As Elsa’s numbing waters, to thy soul,

And their fond pleasures had not dyed it dark

As Pyramus the mulberry, thou hadst seen,

In such momentous circumstance alone,

God’s equal justice morally implied

In the forbidden tree. But since I mark thee

In understanding harden’d into stone,

And, to that hardness, spotted too and stain’d,

So that thine eye is dazzled at my word,

I will, that, if not written, yet at least

Painted thou take it in thee, for the cause,

That one brings home his staff inwreath’d with palm.

I thus: “As wax by seal, that changeth not

Its impress, now is stamp’d my brain by thee.

But wherefore soars thy wish’d-for speech so high

Beyond my sight, that loses it the more,

The more it strains to reach it?”—“To the end

That thou mayst know,” she answer’d straight, “the school,

That thou hast follow’d; and how far behind,

When following my discourse, its learning halts:

And mayst behold your art, from the divine

As distant, as the disagreement is

’Twixt earth and heaven’s most high and rapturous orb.”

“I not remember,” I replied, “that e’er

I was estrang’d from thee, nor for such fault

Doth conscience chide me.” Smiling she return’d:

“If thou canst, not remember, call to mind

How lately thou hast drunk of Lethe’s wave;

And, sure as smoke doth indicate a flame,

In that forgetfulness itself conclude

Blame from thy alienated will incurr’d.

From henceforth verily my words shall be

As naked as will suit them to appear

In thy unpractis’d view.” More sparkling now,

And with retarded course the sun possess’d

The circle of mid-day, that varies still

As th’ aspect varies of each several clime,

When, as one, sent in vaward of a troop

For escort, pauses, if perchance he spy

Vestige of somewhat strange and rare: so paus’d

The sev’nfold band, arriving at the verge

Of a dun umbrage hoar, such as is seen,

Beneath green leaves and gloomy branches, oft

To overbrow a bleak and alpine cliff.

And, where they stood, before them, as it seem’d,

Tigris and Euphrates both beheld,

Forth from one fountain issue; and, like friends,

Linger at parting. “O enlight’ning beam!

O glory of our kind! beseech thee say

What water this, which from one source deriv’d

Itself removes to distance from itself?”

To such entreaty answer thus was made:

“Entreat Matilda, that she teach thee this.”

And here, as one, who clears himself of blame

Imputed, the fair dame return’d: “Of me

He this and more hath learnt; and I am safe

That Lethe’s water hath not hid it from him.”

And Beatrice: “Some more pressing care

That oft the memory ’reeves, perchance hath made

His mind’s eye dark. But lo! where Eunoe cows!

Lead thither; and, as thou art wont, revive

His fainting virtue.” As a courteous spirit,

That proffers no excuses, but as soon

As he hath token of another’s will,

Makes it his own; when she had ta’en me, thus

The lovely maiden mov’d her on, and call’d

To Statius with an air most lady-like:

“Come thou with him.” Were further space allow’d,

Then, Reader, might I sing, though but in part,

That beverage, with whose sweetness I had ne’er

Been sated. But, since all the leaves are full,

Appointed for this second strain, mine art

With warning bridle checks me. I return’d

From the most holy wave, regenerate,

If ’en as new plants renew’d with foliage new,

Pure and made apt for mounting to the stars.

PARADISE

CANTO I

His glory, by whose might all things are mov’d,

Pierces the universe, and in one part

Sheds more resplendence, elsewhere less. In heav’n,

That largeliest of his light partakes, was I,

Witness of things, which to relate again

Surpasseth power of him who comes from thence;

For that, so near approaching its desire

Our intellect is to such depth absorb’d,

That memory cannot follow. Nathless all,

That in my thoughts I of that sacred realm

Could store, shall now be matter of my song.

Benign Apollo! this last labour aid,

And make me such a vessel of thy worth,

As thy own laurel claims of me belov’d.

Thus far hath one of steep Parnassus’ brows

Suffic’d me; henceforth there is need of both

For my remaining enterprise Do thou

Enter into my bosom, and there breathe

So, as when Marsyas by thy hand was dragg’d

Forth from his limbs unsheath’d. O power divine!

If thou to me of shine impart so much,

That of that happy realm the shadow’d form

Trac’d in my thoughts I may set forth to view,

Thou shalt behold me of thy favour’d tree

Come to the foot, and crown myself with leaves;

For to that honour thou, and my high theme

Will fit me. If but seldom, mighty Sire!

To grace his triumph gathers thence a wreath

Caesar or bard (more shame for human wills

Deprav’d) joy to the Delphic god must spring

From the Pierian foliage, when one breast

Is with such thirst inspir’d. From a small spark

Great flame hath risen: after me perchance

Others with better voice may pray, and gain

From the Cirrhaean city answer kind.

Through diver passages, the world’s bright lamp

Rises to mortals, but through that which joins

Four circles with the threefold cross, in best

Course, and in happiest constellation set

He comes, and to the worldly wax best gives

Its temper and impression. Morning there,

Here eve was by almost such passage made;

And whiteness had o’erspread that hemisphere,

Blackness the other part; when to the left

I saw Beatrice turn’d, and on the sun

Gazing, as never eagle fix’d his ken.

As from the first a second beam is wont

To issue, and reflected upwards rise,

E’en as a pilgrim bent on his return,

So of her act, that through the eyesight pass’d

Into my fancy, mine was form’d; and straight,

Beyond our mortal wont, I fix’d mine eyes

Upon the sun. Much is allowed us there,

That here exceeds our pow’r; thanks to the place

Made for the dwelling of the human kind

I suffer’d it not long, and yet so long

That I beheld it bick’ring sparks around,

As iron that comes boiling from the fire.

And suddenly upon the day appear’d

A day new-ris’n, as he, who hath the power,

Had with another sun bedeck’d the sky.

Her eyes fast fix’d on the eternal wheels,

Beatrice stood unmov’d; and I with ken

Fix’d upon her, from upward gaze remov’d

At her aspect, such inwardly became

As Glaucus, when he tasted of the herb,

That made him peer among the ocean gods;

Words may not tell of that transhuman change:

And therefore let the example serve, though weak,

For those whom grace hath better proof in store

If I were only what thou didst create,

Then newly, Love! by whom the heav’n is rul’d,

Thou know’st, who by thy light didst bear me up.

Whenas the wheel which thou dost ever guide,

Desired Spirit! with its harmony

Temper’d of thee and measur’d, charm’d mine ear,

Then seem’d to me so much of heav’n to blaze

With the sun’s flame, that rain or flood ne’er made

A lake so broad. The newness of the sound,

And that great light, inflam’d me with desire,

Keener than e’er was felt, to know their cause.

Whence she who saw me, clearly as myself,

To calm my troubled mind, before I ask’d,

Open’d her lips, and gracious thus began:

“With false imagination thou thyself

Mak’st dull, so that thou seest not the thing,

Which thou hadst seen, had that been shaken off.

Thou art not on the earth as thou believ’st;

For light’ning scap’d from its own proper place

Ne’er ran, as thou hast hither now return’d.”

Although divested of my first-rais’d doubt,

By those brief words, accompanied with smiles,

Yet in new doubt was I entangled more,

And said: “Already satisfied, I rest

From admiration deep, but now admire

How I above those lighter bodies rise.”

Whence, after utt’rance of a piteous sigh,

She tow’rds me bent her eyes, with such a look,

As on her frenzied child a mother casts;

Then thus began: “Among themselves all things

Have order; and from hence the form, which makes

The universe resemble God. In this

The higher creatures see the printed steps

Of that eternal worth, which is the end

Whither the line is drawn. All natures lean,

In this their order, diversely, some more,

Some less approaching to their primal source.

Thus they to different havens are mov’d on

Through the vast sea of being, and each one

With instinct giv’n, that bears it in its course;

This to the lunar sphere directs the fire,

This prompts the hearts of mortal animals,

This the brute earth together knits, and binds.

Nor only creatures, void of intellect,

Are aim’d at by this bow; but even those,

That have intelligence and love, are pierc’d.

That Providence, who so well orders all,

With her own light makes ever calm the heaven,

In which the substance, that hath greatest speed,

Is turn’d: and thither now, as to our seat

Predestin’d, we are carried by the force

Of that strong cord, that never looses dart,

But at fair aim and glad. Yet is it true,

That as ofttimes but ill accords the form

To the design of art, through sluggishness

Of unreplying matter, so this course

Is sometimes quitted by the creature, who

Hath power, directed thus, to bend elsewhere;

As from a cloud the fire is seen to fall,

From its original impulse warp’d, to earth,

By vicious fondness. Thou no more admire

Thy soaring, (if I rightly deem,) than lapse

Of torrent downwards from a mountain’s height.

There would in thee for wonder be more cause,

If, free of hind’rance, thou hadst fix’d thyself

Below, like fire unmoving on the earth.”

So said, she turn’d toward the heav’n her face.

CANTO II

All ye, who in small bark have following sail’d,

Eager to listen, on the advent’rous track

Of my proud keel, that singing cuts its way,

Backward return with speed, and your own shores

Revisit, nor put out to open sea,

Where losing me, perchance ye may remain

Bewilder’d in deep maze. The way I pass

Ne’er yet was run: Minerva breathes the gale,

Apollo guides me, and another Nine

To my rapt sight the arctic beams reveal.

Ye other few, who have outstretch’d the neck.

Timely for food of angels, on which here

They live, yet never know satiety,

Through the deep brine ye fearless may put out

Your vessel, marking, well the furrow broad

Before you in the wave, that on both sides

Equal returns. Those, glorious, who pass’d o’er

To Colchos, wonder’d not as ye will do,

When they saw Jason following the plough.

The increate perpetual thirst, that draws

Toward the realm of God’s own form, bore us

Swift almost as the heaven ye behold.

Beatrice upward gaz’d, and I on her,

And in such space as on the notch a dart

Is plac’d, then loosen’d flies, I saw myself

Arriv’d, where wond’rous thing engag’d my sight.

Whence she, to whom no work of mine was hid,

Turning to me, with aspect glad as fair,

Bespake me: “Gratefully direct thy mind

To God, through whom to this first star we come.”

Me seem’d as if a cloud had cover’d us,

Translucent, solid, firm, and polish’d bright,

Like adamant, which the sun’s beam had smit

Within itself the ever-during pearl

Receiv’d us, as the wave a ray of light

Receives, and rests unbroken. If I then

Was of corporeal frame, and it transcend

Our weaker thought, how one dimension thus

Another could endure, which needs must be

If body enter body, how much more

Must the desire inflame us to behold

That essence, which discovers by what means

God and our nature join’d! There will be seen

That which we hold through faith, not shown by proof,

But in itself intelligibly plain,

E’en as the truth that man at first believes.

I answered: “Lady! I with thoughts devout,

Such as I best can frame, give thanks to Him,

Who hath remov’d me from the mortal world.

But tell, I pray thee, whence the gloomy spots

Upon this body, which below on earth

Give rise to talk of Cain in fabling quaint?”

She somewhat smil’d, then spake: “If mortals err

In their opinion, when the key of sense

Unlocks not, surely wonder’s weapon keen

Ought not to pierce thee; since thou find’st, the wings

Of reason to pursue the senses’ flight

Are short. But what thy own thought is, declare.”

Then I: “What various here above appears,

Is caus’d, I deem, by bodies dense or rare.”

She then resum’d: “Thou certainly wilt see

In falsehood thy belief o’erwhelm’d, if well

Thou listen to the arguments, which I

Shall bring to face it. The eighth sphere displays

Numberless lights, the which in kind and size

May be remark’d of different aspects;

If rare or dense of that were cause alone,

One single virtue then would be in all,

Alike distributed, or more, or less.

Different virtues needs must be the fruits

Of formal principles, and these, save one,

Will by thy reasoning be destroy’d. Beside,

If rarity were of that dusk the cause,

Which thou inquirest, either in some part

That planet must throughout be void, nor fed

With its own matter; or, as bodies share

Their fat and leanness, in like manner this

Must in its volume change the leaves. The first,

If it were true, had through the sun’s eclipse

Been manifested, by transparency

Of light, as through aught rare beside effus’d.

But this is not. Therefore remains to see

The other cause: and if the other fall,

Erroneous so must prove what seem’d to thee.

If not from side to side this rarity

Pass through, there needs must be a limit, whence

Its contrary no further lets it pass.

And hence the beam, that from without proceeds,

Must be pour’d back, as colour comes, through glass

Reflected, which behind it lead conceals.

Now wilt thou say, that there of murkier hue

Than in the other part the ray is shown,

By being thence refracted farther back.

From this perplexity will free thee soon

Experience, if thereof thou trial make,

The fountain whence your arts derive their streame.

Three mirrors shalt thou take, and two remove

From thee alike, and more remote the third.

Betwixt the former pair, shall meet thine eyes;

Then turn’d toward them, cause behind thy back

A light to stand, that on the three shall shine,

And thus reflected come to thee from all.

Though that beheld most distant do not stretch

A space so ample, yet in brightness thou

Will own it equaling the rest. But now,

As under snow the ground, if the warm ray

Smites it, remains dismantled of the hue

And cold, that cover’d it before, so thee,

Dismantled in thy mind, I will inform

With light so lively, that the tremulous beam

Shall quiver where it falls. Within the heaven,

Where peace divine inhabits, circles round

A body, in whose virtue dies the being

Of all that it contains. The following heaven,

That hath so many lights, this being divides,

Through different essences, from it distinct,

And yet contain’d within it. The other orbs

Their separate distinctions variously

Dispose, for their own seed and produce apt.

Thus do these organs of the world proceed,

As thou beholdest now, from step to step,

Their influences from above deriving,

And thence transmitting downwards. Mark me well,

How through this passage to the truth I ford,

The truth thou lov’st, that thou henceforth alone,

May’st know to keep the shallows, safe, untold.

“The virtue and motion of the sacred orbs,

As mallet by the workman’s hand, must needs

By blessed movers be inspir’d. This heaven,

Made beauteous by so many luminaries,

From the deep spirit, that moves its circling sphere,

Its image takes an impress as a seal:

And as the soul, that dwells within your dust,

Through members different, yet together form’d,

In different pow’rs resolves itself; e’en so

The intellectual efficacy unfolds

Its goodness multiplied throughout the stars;

On its own unity revolving still.

Different virtue compact different

Makes with the precious body it enlivens,

With which it knits, as life in you is knit.

From its original nature full of joy,

The virtue mingled through the body shines,

As joy through pupil of the living eye.

From hence proceeds, that which from light to light

Seems different, and not from dense or rare.

This is the formal cause, that generates

Proportion’d to its power, the dusk or clear.”

CANTO III

That sun, which erst with love my bosom warm’d

Had of fair truth unveil’d the sweet aspect,

By proof of right, and of the false reproof;

And I, to own myself convinc’d and free

Of doubt, as much as needed, rais’d my head

Erect for speech. But soon a sight appear’d,

Which, so intent to mark it, held me fix’d,

That of confession I no longer thought.
As through translucent and smooth glass, or wave

Clear and unmov’d, and flowing not so deep

As that its bed is dark, the shape returns

So faint of our impictur’d lineaments,

That on white forehead set a pearl as strong

Comes to the eye: such saw I many a face,

All stretch’d to speak, from whence I straight conceiv’d

Delusion opposite to that, which rais’d

Between the man and fountain, amorous flame.

Sudden, as I perceiv’d them, deeming these

Reflected semblances to see of whom

They were, I turn’d mine eyes, and nothing saw;

Then turn’d them back, directed on the light

Of my sweet guide, who smiling shot forth beams

From her celestial eyes. “Wonder not thou,”

She cry’d, “at this my smiling, when I see

Thy childish judgment; since not yet on truth

It rests the foot, but, as it still is wont,

Makes thee fall back in unsound vacancy.

True substances are these, which thou behold’st,

Hither through failure of their vow exil’d.

But speak thou with them; listen, and believe,

That the true light, which fills them with desire,

Permits not from its beams their feet to stray.”

Straight to the shadow which for converse seem’d

Most earnest, I addressed me, and began,

As one by over-eagerness perplex’d:

“O spirit, born for joy! who in the rays

Of life eternal, of that sweetness know’st

The flavour, which, not tasted, passes far

All apprehension, me it well would please,

If thou wouldst tell me of thy name, and this

Your station here.” Whence she, with kindness prompt,

And eyes glist’ning with smiles: “Our charity,

To any wish by justice introduc’d,

Bars not the door, no more than she above,

Who would have all her court be like herself.

I was a virgin sister in the earth;

And if thy mind observe me well, this form,

With such addition grac’d of loveliness,

Will not conceal me long, but thou wilt know

Piccarda, in the tardiest sphere thus plac’d,

Here ’mid these other blessed also blest.

Our hearts, whose high affections burn alone

With pleasure, from the Holy Spirit conceiv’d,

Admitted to his order dwell in joy.

And this condition, which appears so low,

Is for this cause assign’d us, that our vows

Were in some part neglected and made void.”

Whence I to her replied: “Something divine

Beams in your countenance, wond’rous fair,

From former knowledge quite transmuting you.

Therefore to recollect was I so slow.

But what thou sayst hath to my memory

Given now such aid, that to retrace your forms

Is easier. Yet inform me, ye, who here

Are happy, long ye for a higher place

More to behold, and more in love to dwell?”

She with those other spirits gently smil’d,

Then answer’d with such gladness, that she seem’d

With love’s first flame to glow: “Brother! our will

Is in composure settled by the power

Of charity, who makes us will alone

What we possess, and nought beyond desire;

If we should wish to be exalted more,

Then must our wishes jar with the high will

Of him, who sets us here, which in these orbs

Thou wilt confess not possible, if here

To be in charity must needs befall,

And if her nature well thou contemplate.

Rather it is inherent in this state

Of blessedness, to keep ourselves within

The divine will, by which our wills with his

Are one. So that as we from step to step

Are plac’d throughout this kingdom, pleases all,

E’en as our King, who in us plants his will;

And in his will is our tranquillity;

It is the mighty ocean, whither tends

Whatever it creates and nature makes.”

Then saw I clearly how each spot in heav’n

Is Paradise, though with like gracious dew

The supreme virtue show’r not over all.

But as it chances, if one sort of food

Hath satiated, and of another still

The appetite remains, that this is ask’d,

And thanks for that return’d; e’en so did I

In word and motion, bent from her to learn

What web it was, through which she had not drawn

The shuttle to its point. She thus began:

“Exalted worth and perfectness of life

The Lady higher up enshrine in heaven,

By whose pure laws upon your nether earth

The robe and veil they wear, to that intent,

That e’en till death they may keep watch or sleep

With their great bridegroom, who accepts each vow,

Which to his gracious pleasure love conforms.

from the world, to follow her, when young

Escap’d; and, in her vesture mantling me,

Made promise of the way her sect enjoins.

Thereafter men, for ill than good more apt,

Forth snatch’d me from the pleasant cloister’s pale.

God knows how after that my life was fram’d.

This other splendid shape, which thou beholdst

At my right side, burning with all the light

Of this our orb, what of myself I tell

May to herself apply. From her, like me

A sister, with like violence were torn

The saintly folds, that shaded her fair brows.

E’en when she to the world again was brought

In spite of her own will and better wont,

Yet not for that the bosom’s inward veil

Did she renounce. This is the luminary

Of mighty Constance, who from that loud blast,

Which blew the second over Suabia’s realm,

That power produc’d, which was the third and last.”

She ceas’d from further talk, and then began

“Ave Maria” singing, and with that song

Vanish’d, as heavy substance through deep wave.

Mine eye, that far as it was capable,

Pursued her, when in dimness she was lost,

Turn’d to the mark where greater want impell’d,

And bent on Beatrice all its gaze.

But she as light’ning beam’d upon my looks:

So that the sight sustain’d it not at first.

Whence I to question her became less prompt.

CANTO IV

Between two kinds of food, both equally

Remote and tempting, first a man might die

Of hunger, ere he one could freely choose.

E’en so would stand a lamb between the maw

Of two fierce wolves, in dread of both alike:

E’en so between two deer a dog would stand,

Wherefore, if I was silent, fault nor praise

I to myself impute, by equal doubts

Held in suspense, since of necessity

It happen’d. Silent was I, yet desire

Was painted in my looks; and thus I spake

My wish more earnestly than language could.

As Daniel, when the haughty king he freed

From ire, that spurr’d him on to deeds unjust

And violent; so look’d Beatrice then.

“Well I discern,” she thus her words address’d,

“How contrary desires each way constrain thee,

So that thy anxious thought is in itself

Bound up and stifled, nor breathes freely forth.

Thou arguest; if the good intent remain;

What reason that another’s violence

Should stint the measure of my fair desert?

“Cause too thou findst for doubt, in that it seems,

That spirits to the stars, as Plato deem’d,

Return. These are the questions which thy will

Urge equally; and therefore I the first

Of that will treat which hath the more of gall.

Of seraphim he who is most ensky’d,

Moses and Samuel, and either John,

Choose which thou wilt, nor even Mary’s self,

Have not in any other heav’n their seats,

Than have those spirits which so late thou saw’st;

Nor more or fewer years exist; but all

Make the first circle beauteous, diversely

Partaking of sweet life, as more or less

Afflation of eternal bliss pervades them.

Here were they shown thee, not that fate assigns

This for their sphere, but for a sign to thee

Of that celestial furthest from the height.

Thus needs, that ye may apprehend, we speak:

Since from things sensible alone ye learn

That, which digested rightly after turns

To intellectual. For no other cause

The scripture, condescending graciously

To your perception, hands and feet to God

Attributes, nor so means: and holy church

Doth represent with human countenance

Gabriel, and Michael, and him who made

Tobias whole. Unlike what here thou seest,

The judgment of Timaeus, who affirms

Each soul restor’d to its particular star,

Believing it to have been taken thence,

When nature gave it to inform her mold:

Since to appearance his intention is

E’en what his words declare: or else to shun

Derision, haply thus he hath disguis’d

His true opinion. If his meaning be,

That to the influencing of these orbs revert

The honour and the blame in human acts,

Perchance he doth not wholly miss the truth.

This principle, not understood aright,

Erewhile perverted well nigh all the world;

So that it fell to fabled names of Jove,

And Mercury, and Mars. That other doubt,

Which moves thee, is less harmful; for it brings

No peril of removing thee from me.

“That, to the eye of man, our justice seems

Unjust, is argument for faith, and not

For heretic declension. To the end

This truth may stand more clearly in your view,

I will content thee even to thy wish

“If violence be, when that which suffers, nought

Consents to that which forceth, not for this

These spirits stood exculpate. For the will,

That will not, still survives unquench’d, and doth

As nature doth in fire, tho’ violence

Wrest it a thousand times; for, if it yield

Or more or less, so far it follows force.

And thus did these, whom they had power to seek

The hallow’d place again. In them, had will

Been perfect, such as once upon the bars

Held Laurence firm, or wrought in Scaevola

To his own hand remorseless, to the path,

Whence they were drawn, their steps had hasten’d back,

When liberty return’d: but in too few

Resolve so steadfast dwells. And by these words

If duly weigh’d, that argument is void,

Which oft might have perplex’d thee still. But now

Another question thwarts thee, which to solve

Might try thy patience without better aid.

I have, no doubt, instill’d into thy mind,

That blessed spirit may not lie; since near

The source of primal truth it dwells for aye:

And thou might’st after of Piccarda learn

That Constance held affection to the veil;

So that she seems to contradict me here.

Not seldom, brother, it hath chanc’d for men

To do what they had gladly left undone,

Yet to shun peril they have done amiss:

E’en as Alcmaeon, at his father’s suit

Slew his own mother, so made pitiless

Not to lose pity. On this point bethink thee,

That force and will are blended in such wise

As not to make the’ offence excusable.

Absolute will agrees not to the wrong,

That inasmuch as there is fear of woe

From non-compliance, it agrees. Of will

Thus absolute Piccarda spake, and I

Of th’ other; so that both have truly said.”

Such was the flow of that pure rill, that well’d

From forth the fountain of all truth; and such

The rest, that to my wond’ring thoughts I found.

“O thou of primal love the prime delight!

Goddess!” I straight reply’d, “whose lively words

Still shed new heat and vigour through my soul!

Affection fails me to requite thy grace

With equal sum of gratitude: be his

To recompense, who sees and can reward thee.

Well I discern, that by that truth alone

Enlighten’d, beyond which no truth may roam,

Our mind can satisfy her thirst to know:

Therein she resteth, e’en as in his lair

The wild beast, soon as she hath reach’d that bound,

And she hath power to reach it; else desire

Were given to no end. And thence doth doubt

Spring, like a shoot, around the stock of truth;

And it is nature which from height to height

On to the summit prompts us. This invites,

This doth assure me, lady, rev’rently

To ask thee of other truth, that yet

Is dark to me. I fain would know, if man

By other works well done may so supply

The failure of his vows, that in your scale

They lack not weight.” I spake; and on me straight

Beatrice look’d with eyes that shot forth sparks

Of love celestial in such copious stream,

That, virtue sinking in me overpower’d,

I turn’d, and downward bent confus’d my sight.

CANTO V

“If beyond earthly wont, the flame of love

Illume me, so that I o’ercome thy power

Of vision, marvel not: but learn the cause

In that perfection of the sight, which soon

As apprehending, hasteneth on to reach

The good it apprehends. I well discern,

How in thine intellect already shines

The light eternal, which to view alone

Ne’er fails to kindle love; and if aught else

Your love seduces, ’t is but that it shows

Some ill-mark’d vestige of that primal beam.

“This would’st thou know, if failure of the vow

By other service may be so supplied,

As from self-question to assure the soul.”

Thus she her words, not heedless of my wish,

Began; and thus, as one who breaks not off

Discourse, continued in her saintly strain.

“Supreme of gifts, which God creating gave

Of his free bounty, sign most evident

Of goodness, and in his account most priz’d,

Was liberty of will, the boon wherewith

All intellectual creatures, and them sole

He hath endow’d. Hence now thou mayst infer

Of what high worth the vow, which so is fram’d

That when man offers, God well-pleas’d accepts;

For in the compact between God and him,

This treasure, such as I describe it to thee,

He makes the victim, and of his own act.

What compensation therefore may he find?

If that, whereof thou hast oblation made,

By using well thou think’st to consecrate,

Thou would’st of theft do charitable deed.

Thus I resolve thee of the greater point.

“But forasmuch as holy church, herein

Dispensing, seems to contradict the truth

I have discover’d to thee, yet behooves

Thou rest a little longer at the board,

Ere the crude aliment, which thou hast taken,

Digested fitly to nutrition turn.

Open thy mind to what I now unfold,

And give it inward keeping. Knowledge comes

Of learning well retain’d, unfruitful else.

“This sacrifice in essence of two things

Consisteth; one is that, whereof ’t is made,

The covenant the other. For the last,

It ne’er is cancell’d if not kept: and hence

I spake erewhile so strictly of its force.

For this it was enjoin’d the Israelites,

Though leave were giv’n them, as thou know’st, to change

The offering, still to offer. Th’ other part,

The matter and the substance of the vow,

May well be such, to that without offence

It may for other substance be exchang’d.

But at his own discretion none may shift

The burden on his shoulders, unreleas’d

By either key, the yellow and the white.

Nor deem of any change, as less than vain,

If the last bond be not within the new

Included, as the quatre in the six.

No satisfaction therefore can be paid

For what so precious in the balance weighs,

That all in counterpoise must kick the beam.

Take then no vow at random: ta’en, with faith

Preserve it; yet not bent, as Jephthah once,

Blindly to execute a rash resolve,

Whom better it had suited to exclaim,

‘I have done ill,’ than to redeem his pledge

By doing worse or, not unlike to him

In folly, that great leader of the Greeks:

Whence, on the alter, Iphigenia mourn’d

Her virgin beauty, and hath since made mourn

Both wise and simple, even all, who hear

Of so fell sacrifice. Be ye more staid,

O Christians, not, like feather, by each wind

Removable: nor think to cleanse ourselves

In every water. Either testament,

The old and new, is yours: and for your guide

The shepherd of the church let this suffice

To save you. When by evil lust entic’d,

Remember ye be men, not senseless beasts;

Nor let the Jew, who dwelleth in your streets,

Hold you in mock’ry. Be not, as the lamb,

That, fickle wanton, leaves its mother’s milk,

To dally with itself in idle play.”

Such were the words that Beatrice spake:

These ended, to that region, where the world

Is liveliest, full of fond desire she turn’d.

Though mainly prompt new question to propose,

Her silence and chang’d look did keep me dumb.

And as the arrow, ere the cord is still,

Leapeth unto its mark; so on we sped

Into the second realm. There I beheld

The dame, so joyous enter, that the orb

Grew brighter at her smiles; and, if the star

Were mov’d to gladness, what then was my cheer,

Whom nature hath made apt for every change!

As in a quiet and clear lake the fish,

If aught approach them from without, do draw

Towards it, deeming it their food; so drew

Full more than thousand splendours towards us,

And in each one was heard: “Lo! one arriv’d

To multiply our loves!” and as each came

The shadow, streaming forth effulgence new,

Witness’d augmented joy. Here, reader! think,

If thou didst miss the sequel of my tale,

To know the rest how sorely thou wouldst crave;

And thou shalt see what vehement desire

Possess’d me, as soon as these had met my view,

To know their state. “O born in happy hour!

Thou to whom grace vouchsafes, or ere thy close

Of fleshly warfare, to behold the thrones

Of that eternal triumph, know to us

The light communicated, which through heaven

Expatiates without bound. Therefore, if aught

Thou of our beams wouldst borrow for thine aid,

Spare not; and of our radiance take thy fill.”

Thus of those piteous spirits one bespake me;

And Beatrice next: “Say on; and trust

As unto gods!”—“How in the light supreme

Thou harbour’st, and from thence the virtue bring’st,

That, sparkling in thine eyes, denotes thy joy,

l mark; but, who thou art, am still to seek;

Or wherefore, worthy spirit! for thy lot

This sphere assign’d, that oft from mortal ken

Is veil’d by others’ beams.” I said, and turn’d

Toward the lustre, that with greeting, kind

Erewhile had hail’d me. Forthwith brighter far

Than erst, it wax’d: and, as himself the sun

Hides through excess of light, when his warm gaze

Hath on the mantle of thick vapours prey’d;

Within its proper ray the saintly shape

Was, through increase of gladness, thus conceal’d;

And, shrouded so in splendour answer’d me,

E’en as the tenour of my song declares.

CANTO VI

“After that Constantine the eagle turn’d

Against the motions of the heav’n, that roll’d

Consenting with its course, when he of yore,

Lavinia’s spouse, was leader of the flight,

A hundred years twice told and more, his seat

At Europe’s extreme point, the bird of Jove

Held, near the mountains, whence he issued first.

There, under shadow of his sacred plumes

Swaying the world, till through successive hands

To mine he came devolv’d. Caesar I was,

And am Justinian; destin’d by the will

Of that prime love, whose influence I feel,

From vain excess to clear th’ encumber’d laws.

Or ere that work engag’d me, I did hold

Christ’s nature merely human, with such faith

Contented. But the blessed Agapete,

Who was chief shepherd, he with warning voice

To the true faith recall’d me. I believ’d

His words: and what he taught, now plainly see,

As thou in every contradiction seest

The true and false oppos’d. Soon as my feet

Were to the church reclaim’d, to my great task,

By inspiration of God’s grace impell’d,

I gave me wholly, and consign’d mine arms

To Belisarius, with whom heaven’s right hand

Was link’d in such conjointment, ’t was a sign

That I should rest. To thy first question thus

I shape mine answer, which were ended here,

But that its tendency doth prompt perforce

To some addition; that thou well, mayst mark

What reason on each side they have to plead,

By whom that holiest banner is withstood,

Both who pretend its power and who oppose.

“Beginning from that hour, when Pallas died

To give it rule, behold the valorous deeds

Have made it worthy reverence. Not unknown

To thee, how for three hundred years and more

It dwelt in Alba, up to those fell lists

Where for its sake were met the rival three;

Nor aught unknown to thee, which it achiev’d

Down to the Sabines’ wrong to Lucrece’ woe,

With its sev’n kings conqu’ring the nation round;

Nor all it wrought, by Roman worthies home

’Gainst Brennus and th’ Epirot prince, and hosts

Of single chiefs, or states in league combin’d

Of social warfare; hence Torquatus stern,

And Quintius nam’d of his neglected locks,

The Decii, and the Fabii hence acquir’d

Their fame, which I with duteous zeal embalm.

By it the pride of Arab hordes was quell’d,

When they led on by Hannibal o’erpass’d

The Alpine rocks, whence glide thy currents, Po!

Beneath its guidance, in their prime of days

Scipio and Pompey triumph’d; and that hill,

Under whose summit thou didst see the light,

Rued its stern bearing. After, near the hour,

When heav’n was minded that o’er all the world

His own deep calm should brood, to Caesar’s hand

Did Rome consign it; and what then it wrought

From Var unto the Rhine, saw Isere's flood,

Saw Loire and Seine, and every vale, that fills

The torrent Rhone. What after that it wrought,

When from Ravenna it came forth, and leap'd

The Rubicon, was of so bold a flight,

That tongue nor pen may follow it. Tow'rds Spain

It wheel'd its bands, then tow'rd Dyrrachium smote,

And on Pharsalia with so fierce a plunge,

E'en the warm Nile was conscious to the pang;

Its native shores Antandros, and the streams

Of Simois revisited, and there

Where Hector lies; then ill for Ptolemy

His pennons shook again; lightning thence fell

On Juba; and the next upon your west,

At sound of the Pompeian trump, return’d.

“What following and in its next bearer’s gripe

It wrought, is now by Cassius and Brutus

Bark’d off in hell, and by Perugia’s sons

And Modena’s was mourn’d. Hence weepeth still

Sad Cleopatra, who, pursued by it,

Took from the adder black and sudden death.

With him it ran e’en to the Red Sea coast;

With him compos’d the world to such a peace,

That of his temple Janus barr’d the door.

“But all the mighty standard yet had wrought,

And was appointed to perform thereafter,

Throughout the mortal kingdom which it sway’d,

Falls in appearance dwindled and obscur’d,

If one with steady eye and perfect thought

On the third Caesar look; for to his hands,

The living Justice, in whose breath I move,

Committed glory, e’en into his hands,

To execute the vengeance of its wrath.

“Hear now and wonder at what next I tell.

After with Titus it was sent to wreak

Vengeance for vengeance of the ancient sin,

And, when the Lombard tooth, with fangs impure,

Did gore the bosom of the holy church,

Under its wings victorious, Charlemagne

Sped to her rescue. Judge then for thyself

Of those, whom I erewhile accus’d to thee,

What they are, and how grievous their offending,

Who are the cause of all your ills. The one

Against the universal ensign rears

The yellow lilies, and with partial aim

That to himself the other arrogates:

So that ’t is hard to see which more offends.

Be yours, ye Ghibellines, to veil your arts

Beneath another standard: ill is this

Follow’d of him, who severs it and justice:

And let not with his Guelphs the new-crown’d Charles

Assail it, but those talons hold in dread,

Which from a lion of more lofty port

Have rent the easing. Many a time ere now

The sons have for the sire’s transgression wail’d;

Nor let him trust the fond belief, that heav’n

Will truck its armour for his lilied shield.

“This little star is furnish’d with good spirits,

Whose mortal lives were busied to that end,

That honour and renown might wait on them:

And, when desires thus err in their intention,

True love must needs ascend with slacker beam.

But it is part of our delight, to measure

Our wages with the merit; and admire

The close proportion. Hence doth heav’nly justice

Temper so evenly affection in us,

It ne’er can warp to any wrongfulness.

Of diverse voices is sweet music made:

So in our life the different degrees

Render sweet harmony among these wheels.

“Within the pearl, that now encloseth us,

Shines Romeo’s light, whose goodly deed and fair

Met ill acceptance. But the Provencals,

That were his foes, have little cause for mirth.

Ill shapes that man his course, who makes his wrong

Of other’s worth. Four daughters were there born

To Raymond Berenger, and every one

Became a queen; and this for him did Romeo,

Though of mean state and from a foreign land.

Yet envious tongues incited him to ask

A reckoning of that just one, who return’d

Twelve fold to him for ten. Aged and poor

He parted thence: and if the world did know

The heart he had, begging his life by morsels,

’T would deem the praise, it yields him, scantly dealt.”

CANTO VII

“Hosanna Sanctus Deus Sabaoth

Superillustrans claritate tua

Felices ignes horum malahoth!”

Thus chanting saw I turn that substance bright

With fourfold lustre to its orb again,

Revolving; and the rest unto their dance

With it mov’d also; and like swiftest sparks,

In sudden distance from my sight were veil’d.

Me doubt possess’d, and “Speak,” it whisper’d me,

“Speak, speak unto thy lady, that she quench

Thy thirst with drops of sweetness.” Yet blank awe,

Which lords it o’er me, even at the sound

Of Beatrice’s name, did bow me down

As one in slumber held. Not long that mood

Beatrice suffer’d: she, with such a smile,

As might have made one blest amid the flames,

Beaming upon me, thus her words began:

“Thou in thy thought art pond’ring (as I deem),

And what I deem is truth how just revenge

Could be with justice punish’d: from which doubt

I soon will free thee; so thou mark my words;

For they of weighty matter shall possess thee.

“That man, who was unborn, himself condemn’d,

And, in himself, all, who since him have liv’d,

His offspring: whence, below, the human kind

Lay sick in grievous error many an age;

Until it pleas’d the Word of God to come

Amongst them down, to his own person joining

The nature, from its Maker far estrang’d,

By the mere act of his eternal love.

Contemplate here the wonder I unfold.

The nature with its Maker thus conjoin’d,

Created first was blameless, pure and good;

But through itself alone was driven forth

From Paradise, because it had eschew’d

The way of truth and life, to evil turn’d.

Ne’er then was penalty so just as that

Inflicted by the cross, if thou regard

The nature in assumption doom’d: ne’er wrong

So great, in reference to him, who took

Such nature on him, and endur’d the doom.

God therefore and the Jews one sentence pleased:

So different effects flow’d from one act,

And heav’n was open’d, though the earth did quake.

Count it not hard henceforth, when thou dost hear

That a just vengeance was by righteous court

Justly reveng’d. But yet I see thy mind

By thought on thought arising sore perplex’d,

And with how vehement desire it asks

Solution of the maze. What I have heard,

Is plain, thou sayst: but wherefore God this way

For our redemption chose, eludes my search.

“Brother! no eye of man not perfected,

Nor fully ripen’d in the flame of love,

May fathom this decree. It is a mark,

In sooth, much aim’d at, and but little kenn’d:

And I will therefore show thee why such way

Was worthiest. The celestial love, that spume

All envying in its bounty, in itself

With such effulgence blazeth, as sends forth

All beauteous things eternal. What distils

Immediate thence, no end of being knows,

Bearing its seal immutably impress’d.

Whatever thence immediate falls, is free,

Free wholly, uncontrollable by power

Of each thing new: by such conformity

More grateful to its author, whose bright beams,

Though all partake their shining, yet in those

Are liveliest, which resemble him the most.

These tokens of pre-eminence on man

Largely bestow’d, if any of them fail,

He needs must forfeit his nobility,

No longer stainless. Sin alone is that,

Which doth disfranchise him, and make unlike

To the chief good; for that its light in him

Is darken’d. And to dignity thus lost

Is no return; unless, where guilt makes void,

He for ill pleasure pay with equal pain.

Your nature, which entirely in its seed

Trangress’d, from these distinctions fell, no less

Than from its state in Paradise; nor means

Found of recovery (search all methods out

As strickly as thou may) save one of these,

The only fords were left through which to wade,

Either that God had of his courtesy

Releas’d him merely, or else man himself

For his own folly by himself aton’d.

“Fix now thine eye, intently as thou canst,

On th’ everlasting counsel, and explore,

Instructed by my words, the dread abyss.

“Man in himself had ever lack’d the means

Of satisfaction, for he could not stoop

Obeying, in humility so low,

As high he, disobeying, thought to soar:

And for this reason he had vainly tried

Out of his own sufficiency to pay

The rigid satisfaction. Then behooved

That God should by his own ways lead him back

Unto the life, from whence he fell, restor’d:

By both his ways, I mean, or one alone.

But since the deed is ever priz’d the more,

The more the doer’s good intent appears,

Goodness celestial, whose broad signature

Is on the universe, of all its ways

To raise ye up, was fain to leave out none,

Nor aught so vast or so magnificent,

Either for him who gave or who receiv’d

Between the last night and the primal day,

Was or can be. For God more bounty show’d.

Giving himself to make man capable

Of his return to life, than had the terms

Been mere and unconditional release.

And for his justice, every method else

Were all too scant, had not the Son of God

Humbled himself to put on mortal flesh.

“Now, to fulfil each wish of thine, remains

I somewhat further to thy view unfold.

That thou mayst see as clearly as myself.

“I see, thou sayst, the air, the fire I see,

The earth and water, and all things of them

Compounded, to corruption turn, and soon

Dissolve. Yet these were also things create,

Because, if what were told me, had been true

They from corruption had been therefore free.

“The angels, O my brother! and this clime

Wherein thou art, impassible and pure,

I call created, as indeed they are

In their whole being. But the elements,

Which thou hast nam’d, and what of them is made,

Are by created virtue’ inform’d: create

Their substance, and create the’ informing virtue

In these bright stars, that round them circling move

The soul of every brute and of each plant,

The ray and motion of the sacred lights,

With complex potency attract and turn.

But this our life the’ eternal good inspires

Immediate, and enamours of itself;

So that our wishes rest for ever here.

“And hence thou mayst by inference conclude

Our resurrection certain, if thy mind

Consider how the human flesh was fram’d,

When both our parents at the first were made.”

CANTO VIII

The world was in its day of peril dark

Wont to believe the dotage of fond love

From the fair Cyprian deity, who rolls

In her third epicycle, shed on men

By stream of potent radiance: therefore they

Of elder time, in their old error blind,

Not her alone with sacrifice ador’d

And invocation, but like honours paid

To Cupid and Dione, deem’d of them

Her mother, and her son, him whom they feign’d

To sit in Dido’s bosom: and from her,

Whom I have sung preluding, borrow’d they

The appellation of that star, which views,

Now obvious and now averse, the sun.

I was not ware that I was wafted up

Into its orb; but the new loveliness

That grac’d my lady, gave me ample proof

That we had entered there. And as in flame

A sparkle is distinct, or voice in voice

Discern’d, when one its even tenour keeps,

The other comes and goes; so in that light

I other luminaries saw, that cours’d

In circling motion rapid more or less,

As their eternal phases each impels.

Never was blast from vapour charged with cold,

Whether invisible to eye or no,

Descended with such speed, it had not seem’d

To linger in dull tardiness, compar’d

To those celestial lights, that tow’rds us came,

Leaving the circuit of their joyous ring,

Conducted by the lofty seraphim.

And after them, who in the van appear’d,

Such an hosanna sounded, as hath left

Desire, ne’er since extinct in me, to hear

Renew’d the strain. Then parting from the rest

One near us drew, and sole began: “We all

Are ready at thy pleasure, well dispos’d

To do thee gentle service. We are they,

To whom thou in the world erewhile didst Sing

‘O ye! whose intellectual ministry

Moves the third heaven!’ and in one orb we roll,

One motion, one impulse, with those who rule

Princedoms in heaven; yet are of love so full,

That to please thee ’t will be as sweet to rest.”

After mine eyes had with meek reverence

Sought the celestial guide, and were by her

Assur’d, they turn’d again unto the light

Who had so largely promis’d, and with voice

That bare the lively pressure of my zeal,

“Tell who ye are,” I cried. Forthwith it grew

In size and splendour, through augmented joy;

And thus it answer’d: “A short date below

The world possess’d me. Had the time been more,

Much evil, that will come, had never chanc’d.

My gladness hides thee from me, which doth shine

Around, and shroud me, as an animal

In its own silk unswath’d. Thou lov’dst me well,

And had’st good cause; for had my sojourning

Been longer on the earth, the love I bare thee

Had put forth more than blossoms. The left bank,

That Rhone, when he hath mix’d with Sorga, laves.”
“In me its lord expected, and that horn

Of fair Ausonia, with its boroughs old,

Bari, and Croton, and Gaeta pil'd,

From where the Trento disembogues his waves,

With Verde mingled, to the salt sea-flood.

Already on my temples beam'd the crown,

Which gave me sov'reignty over the land

By Danube wash'd, whenas he strays beyond

The limits of his German shores. The realm,

Where, on the gulf by stormy Eurus lash'd,

Betwixt Pelorus and Pachynian heights,

The beautiful Trinacria lies in gloom

(Not through Typhaeus, but the vap'ry cloud

Bituminous upsteam'd), THAT too did look

To have its scepter wielded by a race

Of monarchs, sprung through me from Charles and Rodolph;

had not ill lording which doth spirit up

The people ever, in Palermo rais’d

The shout of ‘death,’ re-echo’d loud and long.

Had but my brother’s foresight kenn’d as much,

He had been warier that the greedy want

Of Catalonia might not work his bale.

And truly need there is, that he forecast,

Or other for him, lest more freight be laid

On his already over-laden bark.

Nature in him, from bounty fall’n to thrift,

Would ask the guard of braver arms, than such

As only care to have their coffers fill’d.”

“My liege, it doth enhance the joy thy words

Infuse into me, mighty as it is,

To think my gladness manifest to thee,

As to myself, who own it, when thou lookst

Into the source and limit of all good,

There, where thou markest that which thou dost speak,

Thence priz’d of me the more. Glad thou hast made me.

Now make intelligent, clearing the doubt

Thy speech hath raised in me; for much I muse,

How bitter can spring up, when sweet is sown.”

I thus inquiring; he forthwith replied:

“If I have power to show one truth, soon that

Shall face thee, which thy questioning declares

Behind thee now conceal’d. The Good, that guides

And blessed makes this realm, which thou dost mount,

Ordains its providence to be the virtue

In these great bodies: nor th’ all perfect Mind

Upholds their nature merely, but in them

Their energy to save: for nought, that lies

Within the range of that unerring bow,

But is as level with the destin’d aim,

As ever mark to arrow’s point oppos’d.

Were it not thus, these heavens, thou dost visit,

Would their effect so work, it would not be

Art, but destruction; and this may not chance,

If th’ intellectual powers, that move these stars,

Fail not, or who, first faulty made them fail.

Wilt thou this truth more clearly evidenc’d?”

To whom I thus: “It is enough: no fear,

I see, lest nature in her part should tire.”

He straight rejoin’d: “Say, were it worse for man,

If he liv’d not in fellowship on earth?”

“Yea,” answer’d I; “nor here a reason needs.”

“And may that be, if different estates

Grow not of different duties in your life?

Consult your teacher, and he tells you ‘no’.”

Thus did he come, deducing to this point,

And then concluded: “For this cause behooves,

The roots, from whence your operations come,

Must differ. Therefore one is Solon born;

Another, Xerxes; and Melchisidec

A third; and he a fourth, whose airy voyage

Cost him his son. In her circuitous course,

Nature, that is the seal to mortal wax,

Doth well her art, but no distinctions owns

’Twixt one or other household. Hence befalls

That Esau is so wide of Jacob: hence

Quirinus of so base a father springs,

He dates from Mars his lineage. Were it not

That providence celestial overrul’d,

Nature, in generation, must the path

Trac’d by the generator, still pursue

Unswervingly. Thus place I in thy sight

That, which was late behind thee. But, in sign

Of more affection for thee, ’t is my will

Thou wear this corollary. Nature ever

Finding discordant fortune, like all seed

Out of its proper climate, thrives but ill.

And were the world below content to mark

And work on the foundation nature lays,

It would not lack supply of excellence.

But ye perversely to religion strain

Him, who was born to gird on him the sword,

And of the fluent phrasemen make your king;

Therefore your steps have wander’d from the paths.”

CANTO IX

After solution of my doubt, thy Charles,

O fair Clemenza, of the treachery spake

That must befall his seed: but, “Tell it not,”

Said he, “and let the destin’d years come round.”

Nor may I tell thee more, save that the meed

Of sorrow well-deserv’d shall quit your wrongs.

And now the visage of that saintly light

Was to the sun, that fills it, turn’d again,

As to the good, whose plenitude of bliss

Sufficeth all. O ye misguided souls!

Infatuate, who from such a good estrange

Your hearts, and bend your gaze on vanity,

Alas for you!—And lo! toward me, next,

Another of those splendent forms approach’d,

That, by its outward bright’ning, testified

The will it had to pleasure me. The eyes

Of Beatrice, resting, as before,

Firmly upon me, manifested forth

Approval of my wish. “And O,” I cried,

“Blest spirit! quickly be my will perform’d;

And prove thou to me, that my inmost thoughts

I can reflect on thee.” Thereat the light,

That yet was new to me, from the recess,

Where it before was singing, thus began,

As one who joys in kindness: “In that part

Of the deprav’d Italian land, which lies

Between Rialto, and the fountain-springs

Of Brenta and of Piava, there doth rise,

But to no lofty eminence, a hill,

From whence erewhile a firebrand did descend,

That sorely sheet the region. From one root

I and it sprang; my name on earth Cunizza:

And here I glitter, for that by its light

This star o’ercame me. Yet I naught repine,

Nor grudge myself the cause of this my lot,

Which haply vulgar hearts can scarce conceive.

“This jewel, that is next me in our heaven,

Lustrous and costly, great renown hath left,

And not to perish, ere these hundred years

Five times absolve their round. Consider thou,

If to excel be worthy man’s endeavour,

When such life may attend the first. Yet they

Care not for this, the crowd that now are girt

By Adice and Tagliamento, still

Impenitent, tho’ scourg’d. The hour is near,

When for their stubbornness at Padua’s marsh

The water shall be chang’d, that laves Vicena

And where Cagnano meets with Sile, one

Lords it, and bears his head aloft, for whom

The web is now a-warping. Feltro too

Shall sorrow for its godless shepherd’s fault,

Of so deep stain, that never, for the like,

Was Malta’s bar unclos’d. Too large should be

The skillet, that would hold Ferrara’s blood,

And wearied he, who ounce by ounce would weight it,

The which this priest, in show of party-zeal,

Courteous will give; nor will the gift ill suit

The country’s custom. We descry above,

Mirrors, ye call them thrones, from which to us

Reflected shine the judgments of our God:

Whence these our sayings we avouch for good.”

She ended, and appear’d on other thoughts

Intent, re-ent’ring on the wheel she late

Had left. That other joyance meanwhile wax’d

A thing to marvel at, in splendour glowing,

Like choicest ruby stricken by the sun,

For, in that upper clime, effulgence comes

Of gladness, as here laughter: and below,

As the mind saddens, murkier grows the shade.

“God seeth all: and in him is thy sight,”

Said I, “blest Spirit! Therefore will of his

Cannot to thee be dark. Why then delays

Thy voice to satisfy my wish untold,

That voice which joins the inexpressive song,

Pastime of heav’n, the which those ardours sing,

That cowl them with six shadowing wings outspread?

I would not wait thy asking, wert thou known

To me, as thoroughly I to thee am known.”

He forthwith answ’ring, thus his words began:

“The valley’ of waters, widest next to that

Which doth the earth engarland, shapes its course,

Between discordant shores, against the sun

Inward so far, it makes meridian there,

Where was before th’ horizon. Of that vale

Dwelt I upon the shore, ’twixt Ebro’s stream

And Macra’s, that divides with passage brief

Genoan bounds from Tuscan. East and west

Are nearly one to Begga and my land,

Whose haven erst was with its own blood warm.

Who knew my name were wont to call me Folco:

And I did bear impression of this heav’n,

That now bears mine: for not with fiercer flame

Glow’d Belus’ daughter, injuring alike

Sichaeus and Creusa, than did I,

Long as it suited the unripen’d down

That fledg’d my cheek: nor she of Rhodope,

That was beguiled of Demophoon;

Nor Jove’s son, when the charms of Iole

Were shrin’d within his heart. And yet there hides

No sorrowful repentance here, but mirth,

Not for the fault (that doth not come to mind),

But for the virtue, whose o’erruling sway

And providence have wrought thus quaintly. Here

The skill is look’d into, that fashioneth

With such effectual working, and the good

Discern’d, accruing to this upper world

From that below. But fully to content

Thy wishes, all that in this sphere have birth,

Demands my further parle. Inquire thou wouldst,

Who of this light is denizen, that here

Beside me sparkles, as the sun-beam doth

On the clear wave. Know then, the soul of Rahab

Is in that gladsome harbour, to our tribe

United, and the foremost rank assign’d.

He to that heav’n, at which the shadow ends

Of your sublunar world, was taken up,

First, in Christ’s triumph, of all souls redeem’d:

For well behoov’d, that, in some part of heav’n,

She should remain a trophy, to declare

The mighty contest won with either palm;

For that she favour’d first the high exploit

Of Joshua on the holy land, whereof

The Pope recks little now. Thy city, plant

Of him, that on his Maker turn’d the back,

And of whose envying so much woe hath sprung,

Engenders and expands the cursed flower,

That hath made wander both the sheep and lambs,

Turning the shepherd to a wolf. For this,

The gospel and great teachers laid aside,

The decretals, as their stuft margins show,

Are the sole study. Pope and Cardinals,

Intent on these, ne’er journey but in thought

To Nazareth, where Gabriel op’d his wings.

Yet it may chance, erelong, the Vatican,

And other most selected parts of Rome,

That were the grave of Peter’s soldiery,

Shall be deliver’d from the adult’rous bond.”

CANTO X

Looking into his first-born with the love,

Which breathes from both eternal, the first Might

Ineffable, whence eye or mind

Can roam, hath in such order all dispos’d,

As none may see and fail to enjoy. Raise, then,

O reader! to the lofty wheels, with me,

Thy ken directed to the point, whereat

One motion strikes on th’ other. There begin

Thy wonder of the mighty Architect,

Who loves his work so inwardly, his eye

Doth ever watch it. See, how thence oblique

Brancheth the circle, where the planets roll

To pour their wished influence on the world;

Whose path not bending thus, in heav'n above

Much virtue would be lost, and here on earth,

All power well nigh extinct: or, from direct

Were its departure distant more or less,

I' th' universal order, great defect

Must, both in heav'n and here beneath, ensue.

Now rest thee, reader! on thy bench, and muse

Anticipative of the feast to come;

So shall delight make thee not feel thy toil.

Lo! I have set before thee, for thyself

Feed now: the matter I indite, henceforth

Demands entire my thought. Join’d with the part,

Which late we told of, the great minister

Of nature, that upon the world imprints

The virtue of the heaven, and doles out

Time for us with his beam, went circling on

Along the spires, where each hour sooner comes;

And I was with him, weetless of ascent,

As one, who till arriv’d, weets not his coming.

For Beatrice, she who passeth on

So suddenly from good to better, time

Counts not the act, oh then how great must needs

Have been her brightness! What she was i’ th’ sun

(Where I had enter’d), not through change of hue,

But light transparent—did I summon up

Genius, art, practice—I might not so speak,

It should be e’er imagin’d: yet believ’d

It may be, and the sight be justly crav’d.

And if our fantasy fail of such height,

What marvel, since no eye above the sun

Hath ever travel’d? Such are they dwell here,

Fourth family of the Omnipotent Sire,

Who of his spirit and of his offspring shows;

And holds them still enraptur’d with the view.

And thus to me Beatrice: “Thank, oh thank,

The Sun of angels, him, who by his grace

To this perceptible hath lifted thee.”

Never was heart in such devotion bound,

And with complacency so absolute

Dispos’d to render up itself to God,

As mine was at those words: and so entire

The love for Him, that held me, it eclips’d

Beatrice in oblivion. Naught displeas’d

Was she, but smil’d thereat so joyously,

That of her laughing eyes the radiance brake

And scatter’d my collected mind abroad.

Then saw I a bright band, in liveliness

Surpassing, who themselves did make the crown,

And us their centre: yet more sweet in voice,

Than in their visage beaming. Cinctur’d thus,

Sometime Latona’s daughter we behold,

When the impregnate air retains the thread,

That weaves her zone. In the celestial court,

Whence I return, are many jewels found,

So dear and beautiful, they cannot brook

Transporting from that realm: and of these lights

Such was the song. Who doth not prune his wing

To soar up thither, let him look from thence

For tidings from the dumb. When, singing thus,

Those burning suns that circled round us thrice,

As nearest stars around the fixed pole,

Then seem’d they like to ladies, from the dance

Not ceasing, but suspense, in silent pause,

List’ning, till they have caught the strain anew:

Suspended so they stood: and, from within,

Thus heard I one, who spake: “Since with its beam

The grace, whence true love lighteth first his flame,

That after doth increase by loving, shines

So multiplied in thee, it leads thee up

Along this ladder, down whose hallow’d steps

None e’er descend, and mount them not again,

Who from his phial should refuse thee wine

To slake thy thirst, no less constrained were,

Than water flowing not unto the sea.

Thou fain wouldst hear, what plants are these, that bloom

In the bright garland, which, admiring, girds

This fair dame round, who strengthens thee for heav’n.

I then was of the lambs, that Dominic

Leads, for his saintly flock, along the way,

Where well they thrive, not sworn with vanity.

He, nearest on my right hand, brother was,

And master to me: Albert of Cologne

Is this: and of Aquinum, Thomas I.

If thou of all the rest wouldst be assur’d,

Let thine eye, waiting on the words I speak,

In circuit journey round the blessed wreath.

That next resplendence issues from the smile

Of Gratian, who to either forum lent

Such help, as favour wins in Paradise.

The other, nearest, who adorns our quire,

Was Peter, he that with the widow gave

To holy church his treasure. The fifth light,

Goodliest of all, is by such love inspired,

That all your world craves tidings of its doom:

Within, there is the lofty light, endow’d

With sapience so profound, if truth be truth,

That with a ken of such wide amplitude

No second hath arisen. Next behold

That taper’s radiance, to whose view was shown,

Clearliest, the nature and the ministry

Angelical, while yet in flesh it dwelt.

In the other little light serenely smiles

That pleader for the Christian temples, he

Who did provide Augustin of his lore.

Now, if thy mind’s eye pass from light to light,

Upon my praises following, of the eighth

Thy thirst is next. The saintly soul, that shows

The world’s deceitfulness, to all who hear him,

Is, with the sight of all the good, that is,

Blest there. The limbs, whence it was driven, lie

Down in Cieldauro, and from martyrdom

And exile came it here. Lo! further on,

Where flames the arduous Spirit of Isidore,

Of Bede, and Richard, more than man, erewhile,

In deep discernment. Lastly this, from whom

Thy look on me reverteth, was the beam

Of one, whose spirit, on high musings bent,

Rebuk’d the ling’ring tardiness of death.

It is the eternal light of Sigebert,

Who ’scap’d not envy, when of truth he argued,

Reading in the straw-litter’d street.” Forthwith,

As clock, that calleth up the spouse of God

To win her bridegroom’s love at matin’s hour,

Each part of other fitly drawn and urg’d,

Sends out a tinkling sound, of note so sweet,

Affection springs in well-disposed breast;

Thus saw I move the glorious wheel, thus heard

Voice answ’ring voice, so musical and soft,

It can be known but where day endless shines.

CANTO XI

O fond anxiety of mortal men!

How vain and inconclusive arguments

Are those, which make thee beat thy wings below

For statues one, and one for aphorisms

Was hunting; this the priesthood follow’d, that

By force or sophistry aspir’d to rule;

To rob another, and another sought

By civil business wealth; one moiling lay

Tangled in net of sensual delight,

And one to witless indolence resign’d;

What time from all these empty things escap’d,

With Beatrice, I thus gloriously

Was rais’d aloft, and made the guest of heav’n.

They of the circle to that point, each one.

Where erst it was, had turn’d; and steady glow’d,

As candle in his socket. Then within

The lustre, that erewhile bespake me, smiling

With merer gladness, heard I thus begin:

“E’en as his beam illumes me, so I look

Into the eternal light, and clearly mark

Thy thoughts, from whence they rise. Thou art in doubt,

And wouldst, that I should bolt my words afresh

In such plain open phrase, as may be smooth

To thy perception, where I told thee late

That ‘well they thrive;’ and that ‘no second such

Hath risen,’ which no small distinction needs.

“The providence, that governeth the world,

In depth of counsel by created ken

Unfathomable, to the end that she,

Who with loud cries was ’spous’d in precious blood,

Might keep her footing towards her well-belov’d,

Safe in herself and constant unto him,

Hath two ordain’d, who should on either hand

In chief escort her: one seraphic all

In fervency; for wisdom upon earth,

The other splendour of cherubic light.

I but of one will tell: he tells of both,

Who one commendeth which of them so’er

Be taken: for their deeds were to one end.

“Between Tupino, and the wave, that falls

From blest Ubaldo’s chosen hill, there hangs

Rich slope of mountain high, whence heat and cold

Are wafted through Perugia’s eastern gate:

And Norcera with Gualdo, in its rear

Mourn for their heavy yoke. Upon that side,

Where it doth break its steepness most, arose

A sun upon the world, as duly this

From Ganges doth: therefore let none, who speak

Of that place, say Ascesi; for its name

Were lamely so deliver’d; but the East,

To call things rightly, be it henceforth styl’d.

He was not yet much distant from his rising,

When his good influence ’gan to bless the earth.

A dame to whom none openeth pleasure’s gate

More than to death, was, ’gainst his father’s will,

His stripling choice: and he did make her his,

Before the Spiritual court, by nuptial bonds,

And in his father’s sight: from day to day,

Then lov’d her more devoutly. She, bereav’d

Of her first husband, slighted and obscure,

Thousand and hundred years and more, remain’d

Without a single suitor, till he came.

Nor aught avail’d, that, with Amyclas, she

Was found unmov’d at rumour of his voice,

Who shook the world: nor aught her constant boldness

Whereby with Christ she mounted on the cross,

When Mary stay’d beneath. But not to deal

Thus closely with thee longer, take at large

The rovers’ titles—Poverty and Francis.

Their concord and glad looks, wonder and love,

And sweet regard gave birth to holy thoughts,

So much, that venerable Bernard first

Did bare his feet, and, in pursuit of peace

So heavenly, ran, yet deem’d his footing slow.

O hidden riches! O prolific good!

Egidius bares him next, and next Sylvester,

And follow both the bridegroom; so the bride

Can please them. Thenceforth goes he on his way,

The father and the master, with his spouse,

And with that family, whom now the cord

Girt humbly: nor did abjectness of heart

Weigh down his eyelids, for that he was son

Of Pietro Bernardone, and by men

In wond’rous sort despis’d. But royally

His hard intention he to Innocent

Set forth, and from him first receiv’d the seal

On his religion. Then, when numerous flock’d

The tribe of lowly ones, that trac’d HIS steps,

Whose marvellous life deservedly were sung

In heights empyreal, through Honorius’ hand

A second crown, to deck their Guardian’s virtues,

Was by the eternal Spirit inwreath’d: and when

He had, through thirst of martyrdom, stood up

In the proud Soldan’s presence, and there preach’d

Christ and his followers; but found the race

Unripen’d for conversion: back once more

He hasted (not to intermit his toil),

And reap’d Ausonian lands. On the hard rock,

’Twixt Arno and the Tyber, he from Christ

Took the last Signet, which his limbs two years

Did carry. Then the season come, that he,

Who to such good had destin’d him, was pleas’d

T’ advance him to the meed, which he had earn’d

By his self-humbling, to his brotherhood,

As their just heritage, he gave in charge

His dearest lady, and enjoin’d their love

And faith to her: and, from her bosom, will’d

His goodly spirit should move forth, returning

To its appointed kingdom, nor would have

His body laid upon another bier.

“Think now of one, who were a fit colleague,

To keep the bark of Peter in deep sea

Helm’d to right point; and such our Patriarch was.

Therefore who follow him, as he enjoins,

Thou mayst be certain, take good lading in.

But hunger of new viands tempts his flock,

So that they needs into strange pastures wide

Must spread them: and the more remote from him

The stragglers wander, so much mole they come

Home to the sheep-fold, destitute of milk.

There are of them, in truth, who fear their harm,

And to the shepherd cleave; but these so few,

A little stuff may furnish out their cloaks.

“Now, if my words be clear, if thou have ta’en

Good heed, if that, which I have told, recall

To mind, thy wish may be in part fulfill’d:

For thou wilt see the point from whence they split,

Nor miss of the reproof, which that implies,

‘That well they thrive not sworn with vanity.’”

CANTO XII

Soon as its final word the blessed flame

Had rais’d for utterance, straight the holy mill

Began to wheel, nor yet had once revolv’d,

Or ere another, circling, compass’d it,

Motion to motion, song to song, conjoining,

Song, that as much our muses doth excel,

Our Sirens with their tuneful pipes, as ray

Of primal splendour doth its faint reflex.
As when, if Juno bid her handmaid forth,

Two arches parallel, and trick’d alike,

Span the thin cloud, the outer taking birth

From that within (in manner of that voice

Whom love did melt away, as sun the mist),

And they who gaze, presageful call to mind

The compact, made with Noah, of the world

No more to be o’erflow’d; about us thus

Of sempiternal roses, bending, wreath’d

Those garlands twain, and to the innermost

E’en thus th’ external answered. When the footing,

And other great festivity, of song,

And radiance, light with light accordant, each

Jocund and blythe, had at their pleasure still’d

(E’en as the eyes by quick volition mov’d,

Are shut and rais’d together), from the heart

Of one amongst the new lights mov’d a voice,

That made me seem like needle to the star,

In turning to its whereabout, and thus

Began: “The love, that makes me beautiful,

Prompts me to tell of th’ other guide, for whom

Such good of mine is spoken. Where one is,

The other worthily should also be;

That as their warfare was alike, alike

Should be their glory. Slow, and full of doubt,

And with thin ranks, after its banner mov’d

The army of Christ (which it so clearly cost

To reappoint), when its imperial Head,

Who reigneth ever, for the drooping host

Did make provision, thorough grace alone,

And not through its deserving. As thou heard’st,

Two champions to the succour of his spouse

He sent, who by their deeds and words might join

Again his scatter’d people. In that clime,

Where springs the pleasant west-wind to unfold

The fresh leaves, with which Europe sees herself

New-garmented; nor from those billows far,

Beyond whose chiding, after weary course,

The sun doth sometimes hide him, safe abides

The happy Callaroga, under guard

Of the great shield, wherein the lion lies

Subjected and supreme. And there was born

The loving million of the Christian faith,

The hollow’d wrestler, gentle to his own,

And to his enemies terrible. So replete

His soul with lively virtue, that when first

Created, even in the mother’s womb,

It prophesied. When, at the sacred font,

The spousals were complete ’twixt faith and him,

Where pledge of mutual safety was exchang’d,

The dame, who was his surety, in her sleep

Beheld the wondrous fruit, that was from him

And from his heirs to issue. And that such

He might be construed, as indeed he was,

She was inspir’d to name him of his owner,

Whose he was wholly, and so call’d him Dominic.

And I speak of him, as the labourer,

Whom Christ in his own garden chose to be

His help-mate. Messenger he seem’d, and friend

Fast-knit to Christ; and the first love he show’d,

Was after the first counsel that Christ gave.

Many a time his nurse, at entering found

That he had ris’n in silence, and was prostrate,

As who should say, “My errand was for this.”

O happy father! Felix rightly nam’d!

O favour’d mother! rightly nam’d Joanna!

If that do mean, as men interpret it.

Not for the world’s sake, for which now they pore

Upon Ostiense and Taddeo’s page,

But for the real manna, soon he grew

Mighty in learning, and did set himself

To go about the vineyard, that soon turns

To wan and wither’d, if not tended well:

And from the see (whose bounty to the just

And needy is gone by, not through its fault,

But his who fills it basely, he besought,

No dispensation for commuted wrong,

Nor the first vacant fortune, nor the tenth),

That to God’s paupers rightly appertain,

But, ’gainst an erring and degenerate world,

Licence to fight, in favour of that seed,

From which the twice twelve cions gird thee round.

Then, with sage doctrine and good will to help,

Forth on his great apostleship he far’d,

Like torrent bursting from a lofty vein;

And, dashing ’gainst the stocks of heresy,

Smote fiercest, where resistance was most stout.

Thence many rivulets have since been turn’d,

Over the garden Catholic to lead

Their living waters, and have fed its plants.

“If such one wheel of that two-yoked car,

Wherein the holy church defended her,

And rode triumphant through the civil broil.

Thou canst not doubt its fellow’s excellence,

Which Thomas, ere my coming, hath declar’d

So courteously unto thee. But the track,

Which its smooth fellies made, is now deserted:

That mouldy mother is where late were lees.

His family, that wont to trace his path,

Turn backward, and invert their steps; erelong

To rue the gathering in of their ill crop,

When the rejected tares in vain shall ask

Admittance to the barn. I question not

But he, who search’d our volume, leaf by leaf,

Might still find page with this inscription on’t,

‘I am as I was wont.’ Yet such were not

From Acquasparta nor Casale, whence

Of those, who come to meddle with the text,

One stretches and another cramps its rule.

Bonaventura’s life in me behold,

From Bagnororegio, one, who in discharge

Of my great offices still laid aside

All sinister aim. Illuminato here,

And Agostino join me: two they were,

Among the first of those barefooted meek ones,

Who sought God’s friendship in the cord: with them

Hugues of Saint Victor, Pietro Mangiadore,

And he of Spain in his twelve volumes shining,

Nathan the prophet, Metropolitan

Chrysostom, and Anselmo, and, who deign’d

To put his hand to the first art, Donatus.

Raban is here: and at my side there shines

Calabria’s abbot, Joachim, endow’d

With soul prophetic. The bright courtesy

Of friar Thomas, and his goodly lore,

Have mov’d me to the blazon of a peer

So worthy, and with me have mov’d this throng.”

CANTO XIII

Let him, who would conceive what now I saw,

Imagine (and retain the image firm,

As mountain rock, the whilst he hears me speak),

Of stars fifteen, from midst the ethereal host

Selected, that, with lively ray serene,

O’ercome the massiest air: thereto imagine

The wain, that, in the bosom of our sky,

Spins ever on its axle night and day,

With the bright summit of that horn which swells

Due from the pole, round which the first wheel rolls,

T’ have rang’d themselves in fashion of two signs

In heav’n, such as Ariadne made,

When death’s chill seized her; and that one of them

Did compass in the other’s beam; and both

In such sort whirl around, that each should tend

With opposite motion and, conceiving thus,

Of that true constellation, and the dance

Twofold, that circled me, he shall attain

As ’t were the shadow; for things there as much

Surpass our usage, as the swiftest heav’n

Is swifter than the Chiana. There was sung

No Bacchus, and no Io Paean, but

Three Persons in the Godhead, and in one

Substance that nature and the human join’d.

The song fulfill’d its measure; and to us

Those saintly lights attended, happier made

At each new minist’ring. Then silence brake,

Amid th’ accordant sons of Deity,

That luminary, in which the wondrous life

Of the meek man of God was told to me;

And thus it spake: “One ear o’ th’ harvest thresh’d,

And its grain safely stor’d, sweet charity

Invites me with the other to like toil.

“Thou know’st, that in the bosom, whence the rib

Was ta’en to fashion that fair cheek, whose taste

All the world pays for, and in that, which pierc’d

By the keen lance, both after and before

Such satisfaction offer’d, as outweighs

Each evil in the scale, whate’er of light

To human nature is allow’d, must all

Have by his virtue been infus’d, who form’d

Both one and other: and thou thence admir’st

In that I told thee, of beatitudes

A second, there is none, to his enclos’d

In the fifth radiance. Open now thine eyes

To what I answer thee; and thou shalt see

Thy deeming and my saying meet in truth,

As centre in the round. That which dies not,

And that which can die, are but each the beam

Of that idea, which our Soverign Sire

Engendereth loving; for that lively light,

Which passeth from his brightness; not disjoin’d

From him, nor from his love triune with them,

Doth, through his bounty, congregate itself,

Mirror’d, as ’t were in new existences,

Itself unalterable and ever one.

“Descending hence unto the lowest powers,

Its energy so sinks, at last it makes

But brief contingencies: for so I name

Things generated, which the heav’nly orbs

Moving, with seed or without seed, produce.

Their wax, and that which molds it, differ much:

And thence with lustre, more or less, it shows

Th’ ideal stamp impress: so that one tree

According to his kind, hath better fruit,

And worse: and, at your birth, ye, mortal men,

Are in your talents various. Were the wax

Molded with nice exactness, and the heav’n

In its disposing influence supreme,

The lustre of the seal should be complete:

But nature renders it imperfect ever,

Resembling thus the artist in her work,

Whose faultering hand is faithless to his skill.

Howe’er, if love itself dispose, and mark

The primal virtue, kindling with bright view,

There all perfection is vouchsafed; and such

The clay was made, accomplish’d with each gift,

That life can teem with; such the burden fill’d

The virgin’s bosom: so that I commend

Thy judgment, that the human nature ne’er

Was or can be, such as in them it was.

“Did I advance no further than this point,

‘How then had he no peer?’ thou might’st reply.

But, that what now appears not, may appear

Right plainly, ponder, who he was, and what

(When he was bidden ‘Ask’), the motive sway’d

To his requesting. I have spoken thus,

That thou mayst see, he was a king, who ask’d

For wisdom, to the end he might be king

Sufficient: not the number to search out

Of the celestial movers; or to know,

If necessary with contingent e’er

Have made necessity; or whether that

Be granted, that first motion is; or if

Of the mid circle can, by art, be made

Triangle with each corner, blunt or sharp.

“Whence, noting that, which I have said, and this,

Thou kingly prudence and that ken mayst learn,

At which the dart of my intention aims.

And, marking clearly, that I told thee, ‘Risen,’

Thou shalt discern it only hath respect

To kings, of whom are many, and the good

Are rare. With this distinction take my words;

And they may well consist with that which thou

Of the first human father dost believe,

And of our well-beloved. And let this

Henceforth be led unto thy feet, to make

Thee slow in motion, as a weary man,

Both to the ‘yea’ and to the ‘nay’ thou seest not.

For he among the fools is down full low,

Whose affirmation, or denial, is

Without distinction, in each case alike

Since it befalls, that in most instances

Current opinion leads to false: and then

Affection bends the judgment to her ply.

“Much more than vainly doth he loose from shore,

Since he returns not such as he set forth,

Who fishes for the truth and wanteth skill.

And open proofs of this unto the world

Have been afforded in Parmenides,

Melissus, Bryso, and the crowd beside,

Who journey’d on, and knew not whither: so did

Sabellius, Arius, and the other fools,

Who, like to scymitars, reflected back

The scripture-image, by distortion marr’d.

“Let not the people be too swift to judge,

As one who reckons on the blades in field,

Or ere the crop be ripe. For I have seen

The thorn frown rudely all the winter long

And after bear the rose upon its top;

And bark, that all the way across the sea

Ran straight and speedy, perish at the last,

E’en in the haven’s mouth seeing one steal,

Another brine, his offering to the priest,

Let not Dame Birtha and Sir Martin thence

Into heav’n’s counsels deem that they can pry:

For one of these may rise, the other fall.”

CANTO XIV

From centre to the circle, and so back

From circle to the centre, water moves

In the round chalice, even as the blow

Impels it, inwardly, or from without.

Such was the image glanc’d into my mind,

As the great spirit of Aquinum ceas’d;

And Beatrice after him her words

Resum’d alternate: “Need there is (tho’ yet

He tells it to you not in words, nor e’en

In thought) that he should fathom to its depth

Another mystery. Tell him, if the light,

Wherewith your substance blooms, shall stay with you

Eternally, as now: and, if it doth,

How, when ye shall regain your visible forms,

The sight may without harm endure the change,

That also tell.” As those, who in a ring

Tread the light measure, in their fitful mirth

Raise loud the voice, and spring with gladder bound;

Thus, at the hearing of that pious suit,

The saintly circles in their tourneying

And wond’rous note attested new delight.

Whoso laments, that we must doff this garb

Of frail mortality, thenceforth to live

Immortally above, he hath not seen

The sweet refreshing, of that heav’nly shower.

Him, who lives ever, and for ever reigns

In mystic union of the Three in One,

Unbounded, bounding all, each spirit thrice

Sang, with such melody, as but to hear

For highest merit were an ample meed.

And from the lesser orb the goodliest light,

With gentle voice and mild, such as perhaps

The angel’s once to Mary, thus replied:

“Long as the joy of Paradise shall last,

Our love shall shine around that raiment, bright,

As fervent; fervent, as in vision blest;

And that as far in blessedness exceeding,

As it hath grave beyond its virtue great.

Our shape, regarmented with glorious weeds

Of saintly flesh, must, being thus entire,

Show yet more gracious. Therefore shall increase,

Whate’er of light, gratuitous, imparts

The Supreme Good; light, ministering aid,

The better disclose his glory: whence

The vision needs increasing, much increase

The fervour, which it kindles; and that too

The ray, that comes from it. But as the greed

Which gives out flame, yet it its whiteness shines

More lively than that, and so preserves

Its proper semblance; thus this circling sphere

Of splendour, shall to view less radiant seem,

Than shall our fleshly robe, which yonder earth

Now covers. Nor will such excess of light

O’erpower us, in corporeal organs made

Firm, and susceptible of all delight.”

So ready and so cordial an “Amen,”

Followed from either choir, as plainly spoke

Desire of their dead bodies; yet perchance

Not for themselves, but for their kindred dear,

Mothers and sires, and those whom best they lov’d,

Ere they were made imperishable flame.

And lo! forthwith there rose up round about

A lustre over that already there,

Of equal clearness, like the brightening up

Of the horizon. As at an evening hour

Of twilight, new appearances through heav’n

Peer with faint glimmer, doubtfully descried;

So there new substances, methought began

To rise in view; and round the other twain

Enwheeling, sweep their ampler circuit wide.

O gentle glitter of eternal beam!

With what a such whiteness did it flow,

O’erpowering vision in me! But so fair,

So passing lovely, Beatrice show’d,

Mind cannot follow it, nor words express

Her infinite sweetness. Thence mine eyes regain’d

Power to look up, and I beheld myself,

Sole with my lady, to more lofty bliss

Translated: for the star, with warmer smile

Impurpled, well denoted our ascent.
With all the heart, and with that tongue which speaks

The same in all, an holocaust I made

To God, befitting the new grace vouchsaf’d.

And from my bosom had not yet upsteam’d

The fuming of that incense, when I knew

The rite accepted. With such mighty sheen

And mantling crimson, in two listed rays

The splendours shot before me, that I cried,

“God of Sabaoth! that does prank them thus!”
As leads the galaxy from pole to pole,

Distinguish’d into greater lights and less,

Its pathway, which the wisest fail to spell;

So thickly studded, in the depth of Mars,

Those rays describ’d the venerable sign,

That quadrants in the round conjoining frame.

Here memory mocks the toil of genius. Christ

Beam’d on that cross; and pattern fails me now.

But whoso takes his cross, and follows Christ

Will pardon me for that I leave untold,

When in the flecker’d dawning he shall spy

The glitterance of Christ. From horn to horn,

And ’tween the summit and the base did move

Lights, scintillating, as they met and pass’d.

Thus oft are seen, with ever-changeful glance,

Straight or athwart, now rapid and now slow,

The atomies of bodies, long or short,

To move along the sunbeam, whose slant line

Checkers the shadow, interpos’d by art

Against the noontide heat. And as the chime

Of minstrel music, dulcimer, and help

With many strings, a pleasant dining makes

To him, who heareth not distinct the note;

So from the lights, which there appear’d to me,

Gather’d along the cross a melody,

That, indistinctly heard, with ravishment

Possess’d me. Yet I mark’d it was a hymn

Of lofty praises; for there came to me

“Arise and conquer,” as to one who hears

And comprehends not. Me such ecstasy

O’ercame, that never till that hour was thing

That held me in so sweet imprisonment.

Perhaps my saying over bold appears,

Accounting less the pleasure of those eyes,

Whereon to look fulfilleth all desire.

But he, who is aware those living seals

Of every beauty work with quicker force,

The higher they are ris’n; and that there

I had not turn’d me to them; he may well

Excuse me that, whereof in my excuse

I do accuse me, and may own my truth;

That holy pleasure here not yet reveal’d,

Which grows in transport as we mount aloof.

CANTO XV

True love, that ever shows itself as clear

In kindness, as loose appetite in wrong,

Silenced that lyre harmonious, and still’d

The sacred chords, that are by heav’n’s right hand

Unwound and tighten’d, flow to righteous prayers

Should they not hearken, who, to give me will

For praying, in accordance thus were mute?

He hath in sooth good cause for endless grief,

Who, for the love of thing that lasteth not,

Despoils himself forever of that love.

As oft along the still and pure serene,

At nightfall, glides a sudden trail of fire,

Attracting with involuntary heed

The eye to follow it, erewhile at rest,

And seems some star that shifted place in heav’n,

Only that, whence it kindles, none is lost,

And it is soon extinct; thus from the horn,

That on the dexter of the cross extends,

Down to its foot, one luminary ran

From mid the cluster shone there; yet no gem

Dropp’d from its foil; and through the beamy list

Like flame in alabaster, glow’d its course.

So forward stretch’d him (if of credence aught

Our greater muse may claim) the pious ghost

Of old Anchises, in the’ Elysian bower,

When he perceiv’d his son. “O thou, my blood!

O most exceeding grace divine! to whom,

As now to thee, hath twice the heav’nly gate

Been e’er unclos’d?” so spake the light; whence I

Turn’d me toward him; then unto my dame

My sight directed, and on either side

Amazement waited me; for in her eyes

Was lighted such a smile, I thought that mine

Had div’d unto the bottom of my grace

And of my bliss in Paradise. Forthwith

To hearing and to sight grateful alike,

The spirit to his proem added things

I understood not, so profound he spake;

Yet not of choice but through necessity

Mysterious; for his high conception scar’d

Beyond the mark of mortals. When the flight

Of holy transport had so spent its rage,

That nearer to the level of our thought

The speech descended, the first sounds I heard

Were, “Best he thou, Triunal Deity!

That hast such favour in my seed vouchsaf’d!”

Then follow'd: "No unpleasant thirst, tho' long,

Which took me reading in the sacred book,

Whose leaves or white or dusky never change,

Thou hast allay'd, my son, within this light,

From whence my voice thou hear'st; more thanks to her.

Who for such lofty mounting has with plumes

Begirt thee. Thou dost deem thy thoughts to me

From him transmitted, who is first of all,

E'en as all numbers ray from unity;

And therefore dost not ask me who I am,

Or why to thee more joyous I appear,

Than any other in this gladsome throng.

The truth is as thou deem'st; for in this hue

Both less and greater in that mirror look,

In which thy thoughts, or ere thou think’st, are shown.

But, that the love, which keeps me wakeful ever,

Urging with sacred thirst of sweet desire,

May be contended fully, let thy voice,

Fearless, and frank and jocund, utter forth

Thy will distinctly, utter forth the wish,

Whereto my ready answer stands decreed.”

I turn’d me to Beatrice; and she heard

Ere I had spoken, smiling, an assent,

That to my will gave wings; and I began

“To each among your tribe, what time ye kenn’d

The nature, in whom naught unequal dwells,

Wisdom and love were in one measure dealt;

For that they are so equal in the sun,

From whence ye drew your radiance and your heat,

As makes all likeness scant. But will and means,

In mortals, for the cause ye well discern,

With unlike wings are fledge. A mortal I

Experience inequality like this,

And therefore give no thanks, but in the heart,

For thy paternal greeting. This howe’er

I pray thee, living topaz! that ingemm’st

This precious jewel, let me hear thy name.”

“I am thy root, O leaf! whom to expect

Even, hath pleas’d me:” thus the prompt reply

Prefacing, next it added: “he, of whom

Thy kindred appellation comes, and who,

These hundred years and more, on its first ledge

Hath circuited the mountain, was my son

And thy great grandsire. Well befits, his long

Endurance should be shorten’d by thy deeds.

“Florence, within her ancient limit-mark,

Which calls her still to matin prayers and noon,

Was chaste and sober, and abode in peace.

She had no armlets and no head-tires then,

No purfled dames, no zone, that caught the eye

More than the person did. Time was not yet,

When at his daughter’s birth the sire grew pale.

For fear the age and dowry should exceed

On each side just proportion. House was none

Void of its family; nor yet had come

Hardanapalus, to exhibit feats

Of chamber prowess. Montemalo yet

O’er our suburban turret rose; as much

To be surpass in fall, as in its rising.

I saw Bellincione Berti walk abroad

In leathern girdle and a clasp of bone;

And, with no artful colouring on her cheeks,

His lady leave the glass. The sons I saw

Of Nerli and of Vecchio well content

With unrob’d jerkin; and their good dames handling

The spindle and the flax; O happy they!

Each sure of burial in her native land,

And none left desolate a-bed for France!

One wak’d to tend the cradle, hushing it

With sounds that lull’d the parent’s infancy:

Another, with her maidens, drawing off

The tresses from the distaff, lectur’d them

Old tales of Troy and Fesole and Rome.

A Salterello and Cianghella we

Had held as strange a marvel, as ye would

A Cincinnatus or Cornelia now.

“In such compos’d and seemly fellowship,

Such faithful and such fair equality,

In so sweet household, Mary at my birth

Bestow’d me, call’d on with loud cries; and there

In your old baptistery, I was made

Christian at once and Cacciaguida; as were

My brethren, Eliseo and Moronto.

“From Valdipado came to me my spouse,

And hence thy surname grew. I follow’d then

The Emperor Conrad; and his knighthood he

Did gird on me; in such good part he took

My valiant service. After him I went

To testify against that evil law,

Whose people, by the shepherd’s fault, possess

Your right, usurping. There, by that foul crew

Was I releas’d from the deceitful world,

Whose base affection many a spirit soils,

And from the martyrdom came to this peace.”

CANTO XVI

O slight respect of man’s nobility!

I never shall account it marvelous,

That our infirm affection here below

Thou mov’st to boasting, when I could not choose,

E’en in that region of unwarp’d desire,

In heav’n itself, but make my vaunt in thee!

Yet cloak thou art soon shorten’d, for that time,

Unless thou be eked out from day to day,

Goes round thee with his shears. Resuming then

With greeting such, as Rome, was first to bear,

But since hath disaccustom’d I began;

And Beatrice, that a little space

Was sever’d, smil’d reminding me of her,

Whose cough embolden’d (as the story holds)

To first offence the doubting Guenever.

“You are my sire,” said I, “you give me heart

Freely to speak my thought: above myself

You raise me. Through so many streams with joy

My soul is fill’d, that gladness wells from it;

So that it bears the mighty tide, and bursts not

Say then, my honour’d stem! what ancestors

Where those you sprang from, and what years were mark’d

In your first childhood? Tell me of the fold,

That hath Saint John for guardian, what was then

Its state, and who in it were highest seated?”

As embers, at the breathing of the wind,

Their flame enliven, so that light I saw

Shine at my blandishments; and, as it grew

More fair to look on, so with voice more sweet,

Yet not in this our modern phrase, forthwith

It answer'd: "From the day, when it was said

'Hail Virgin!' to the throes, by which my mother,

Who now is sainted, lighten'd her of me

Whom she was heavy with, this fire had come,

Five hundred fifty times and thrice, its beams

To reilumine underneath the foot

Of its own lion. They, of whom I sprang,

And I, had there our birth-place, where the last

Partition of our city first is reach’d

By him, that runs her annual game. Thus much

Suffice of my forefathers: who they were,

And whence they hither came, more honourable

It is to pass in silence than to tell.

All those, who in that time were there from Mars

Until the Baptist, fit to carry arms,

Were but the fifth of them this day alive.

But then the citizen’s blood, that now is mix’d

From Campi and Certaldo and Fighine,

Ran purely through the last mechanic’s veins.

O how much better were it, that these people

Were neighbours to you, and that at Galluzzo

And at Trespiano, ye should have your bound’ry,

Than to have them within, and bear the stench

Of Aguglione’s hind, and Signa’s, him,

That hath his eye already keen for bart’ring!

Had not the people, which of all the world

Degenerates most, been stepdame unto Caesar,

But, as a mother, gracious to her son;

Such one, as hath become a Florentine,

And trades and traffics, had been turn’d adrift

To Simifonte, where his grandsire ply’d

The beggar’s craft. The Conti were possess’d

Of Montemurlo still: the Cerchi still

Were in Acone’s parish; nor had haply

From Valdigrieve past the Buondelmonte.

The city’s malady hath ever source

In the confusion of its persons, as

The body’s, in variety of food:

And the blind bull falls with a steeper plunge,

Than the blind lamb; and oftentimes one sword

Doth more and better execution,

Than five. Mark Luni, Urbisaglia mark,

How they are gone, and after them how go

Chiusi and Sinigaglia; and ’t will seem

No longer new or strange to thee to hear,

That families fail, when cities have their end.

All things, that appertain t’ ye, like yourselves,

Are mortal: but mortality in some

Ye mark not, they endure so long, and you

Pass by so suddenly. And as the moon

Doth, by the rolling of her heav’nly sphere,

Hide and reveal the strand unceasingly;

So fortune deals with Florence. Hence admire not

At what of them I tell thee, whose renown

Time covers, the first Florentines. I saw

The Ughi, Catilini and Filippi,

The Alberichi, Greci and Ormanni,

Now in their wane, illustrious citizens:

And great as ancient, of Sannella him,

With him of Arca saw, and Soldanieri

And Ardinghi, and Bostichi. At the poop,

That now is laden with new felony,

So cumb’rous it may speedily sink the bark,

The Ravignani sat, of whom is sprung

The County Guido, and whoso hath since

His title from the fam’d Bellincione ta’en.

Fair governance was yet an art well priz’d

By him of Pressa: Galigaio show’d

The gilded hilt and pommel, in his house.

The column, cloth’d with verrey, still was seen

Unshaken: the Sacchetti still were great,

Giouchi, Sifanti, Galli and Barucci,

With them who blush to hear the bushel nam’d.

Of the Calfucci still the branchy trunk

Was in its strength: and to the curule chairs

Sizii and Arigucci yet were drawn.

How mighty them I saw, whom since their pride

Hath undone! and in all her goodly deeds

Florence was by the bullets of bright gold

O’erflourish’d. Such the sires of those, who now,

As surely as your church is vacant, flock

Into her consistory, and at leisure

There stall them and grow fat. The o’erweening brood,

That plays the dragon after him that flees,

But unto such, as turn and show the tooth,

Ay or the purse, is gentle as a lamb,

Was on its rise, but yet so slight esteem’d,

That Ubertino of Donati grudg’d

His father-in-law should yoke him to its tribe.

Already Caponsacco had descended

Into the mart from Fesole: and Giuda

And Infangato were good citizens.

A thing incredible I tell, tho’ true:

The gateway, named from those of Pera, led

Into the narrow circuit of your walls.

Each one, who bears the sightly quarterings

Of the great Baron (he whose name and worth

The festival of Thomas still revives)

His knighthood and his privilege retain’d;

Albeit one, who borders them With gold,

This day is mingled with the common herd.

In Borgo yet the Gualterotti dwelt,

And Importuni: well for its repose

Had it still lack’d of newer neighbourhood.

The house, from whence your tears have had their spring,

Through the just anger that hath murder’d ye

And put a period to your gladsome days,

Was honour’d, it, and those consorted with it.

O Buondelmonte! what ill counseling

Prevail’d on thee to break the plighted bond

Many, who now are weeping, would rejoice,

Had God to Ema giv’n thee, the first time

Thou near our city cam’st. But so was doom’d:

On that maim’d stone set up to guard the bridge,

At thy last peace, the victim, Florence! fell.

With these and others like to them, I saw

Florence in such assur’d tranquility,

She had no cause at which to grieve: with these

Saw her so glorious and so just, that ne’er

The lily from the lance had hung reverse,

Or through division been with vermeil dyed.”

CANTO XVII

Such as the youth, who came to Clymene

To certify himself of that reproach,

Which had been fasten’d on him, (he whose end

Still makes the fathers chary to their sons),

E’en such was I; nor unobserv’d was such

Of Beatrice, and that saintly lamp,

Who had erewhile for me his station mov’d;

When thus by lady: “Give thy wish free vent,

That it may issue, bearing true report

Of the mind’s impress; not that aught thy words

May to our knowledge add, but to the end,

That thou mayst use thyself to own thy thirst

And men may mingle for thee when they hear.”

“O plant! from whence I spring! rever’d and lov’d!

Who soar’st so high a pitch, thou seest as clear,

As earthly thought determines two obtuse

In one triangle not contain’d, so clear

Dost see contingencies, ere in themselves

Existent, looking at the point whereto

All times are present, I, the whilst I scal’d

With Virgil the soul purifying mount,

And visited the nether world of woe,

Touching my future destiny have heard

Words grievous, though I feel me on all sides

Well squar’d to fortune’s blows. Therefore my will

Were satisfied to know the lot awaits me,

The arrow, seen beforehand, slacks its flight.”

So said I to the brightness, which erewhile

To me had spoken, and my will declar’d,

As Beatrice will’d, explicitly.

Nor with oracular response obscure,

Such, as or ere the Lamb of God was slain,

Beguil’d the credulous nations; but, in terms

Precise and unambiguous lore, replied

The spirit of paternal love, enshrin’d,

Yet in his smile apparent; and thus spake:

“Contingency, unfolded not to view

Upon the tablet of your mortal mold,

Is all depictur’d in the’ eternal sight;

But hence deriveth not necessity,

More then the tall ship, hurried down the flood,

Doth from the vision, that reflects the scene.

From thence, as to the ear sweet harmony

From organ comes, so comes before mine eye

The time prepar’d for thee. Such as driv’n out

From Athens, by his cruel stepdame’s wiles,

Hippolytus departed, such must thou

Depart from Florence. This they wish, and this

Contrive, and will ere long effectuate, there,

Where gainful merchandize is made of Christ,

Throughout the livelong day. The common cry,

Will, as ’t is ever wont, affix the blame

Unto the party injur’d: but the truth

Shall, in the vengeance it dispenseth, find

A faithful witness. Thou shall leave each thing

Belov’d most dearly: this is the first shaft

Shot from the bow of exile. Thou shalt prove

How salt the savour is of other’s bread,

How hard the passage to descend and climb

By other’s stairs, But that shall gall thee most

Will be the worthless and vile company,

With whom thou must be thrown into these straits.

For all ungrateful, impious all and mad,

Shall turn ’gainst thee: but in a little while

Theirs and not thine shall be the crimson’d brow

Their course shall so evince their brutishness

T’ have ta’en thy stand apart shall well become thee.

“First refuge thou must find, first place of rest,

In the great Lombard’s courtesy, who bears

Upon the ladder perch’d the sacred bird.

He shall behold thee with such kind regard,

That ’twixt ye two, the contrary to that

Which falls ’twixt other men, the granting shall

Forerun the asking. With him shalt thou see

That mortal, who was at his birth impress

So strongly from this star, that of his deeds

The nations shall take note. His unripe age

Yet holds him from observance; for these wheels

Only nine years have compass him about.

But, ere the Gascon practice on great Harry,

Sparkles of virtue shall shoot forth in him,

In equal scorn of labours and of gold.

His bounty shall be spread abroad so widely,

As not to let the tongues e’en of his foes

Be idle in its praise. Look thou to him

And his beneficence: for he shall cause

Reversal of their lot to many people,

Rich men and beggars interchanging fortunes.

And thou shalt bear this written in thy soul

Of him, but tell it not;” and things he told

Incredible to those who witness them;

Then added: “So interpret thou, my son,

What hath been told thee.—Lo! the ambushment

That a few circling seasons hide for thee!

Yet envy not thy neighbours: time extends

Thy span beyond their treason’s chastisement.”

Soon, as the saintly spirit, by his silence,

Had shown the web, which I had streteh’d for him

Upon the warp, was woven, I began,

As one, who in perplexity desires

Counsel of other, wise, benign and friendly:

“My father! well I mark how time spurs on

Toward me, ready to inflict the blow,

Which falls most heavily on him, who most

Abandoned himself. Therefore ’t is good

I should forecast, that driven from the place

Most dear to me, I may not lose myself

All others by my song. Down through the world

Of infinite mourning, and along the mount

From whose fair height my lady’s eyes did lift me,

And after through this heav’n from light to light,

Have I learnt that, which if I tell again,

It may with many woefully disrelish;

And, if I am a timid friend to truth,

I fear my life may perish among those,

To whom these days shall be of ancient date.”

The brightness, where enclos’d the treasure smil’d,

Which I had found there, first shone glisteningly,

Like to a golden mirror in the sun;

Next answer'd: "Conscience, dimm'd or by its own

Or other's shame, will feel thy saying sharp.

Thou, notwithstanding, all deceit remov'd,

See the whole vision be made manifest.

And let them wince who have their withers wrung.

What though, when tasted first, thy voice shall prove

Unwelcome, on digestion it will turn

To vital nourishment. The cry thou raisest,

Shall, as the wind doth, smite the proudest summits;

Which is of honour no light argument,

For this there only have been shown to thee,

Throughout these orbs, the mountain, and the deep,

Spirits, whom fame hath note of. For the mind

Of him, who hears, is loth to acquiesce

And fix its faith, unless the instance brought

Be palpable, and proof apparent urge.”

CANTO XVIII

Now in his word, sole, ruminating, joy’d

That blessed spirit; and I fed on mine,

Tempting the sweet with bitter: she meanwhile,

Who led me unto God, admonish’d: “Muse

On other thoughts: bethink thee, that near Him

I dwell, who recompenseth every wrong.”

At the sweet sounds of comfort straight I turn’d;

And, in the saintly eyes what love was seen,

I leave in silence here: nor through distrust

Of my words only, but that to such bliss

The mind remounts not without aid. Thus much

Yet may I speak; that, as I gaz’d on her,

Affection found no room for other wish.

While the everlasting pleasure, that did full

On Beatrice shine, with second view

From her fair countenance my gladden’d soul

Contented; vanquishing me with a beam

Of her soft smile, she spake: “Turn thee, and list.

These eyes are not thy only Paradise.”

As here we sometimes in the looks may see

Th’ affection mark’d, when that its sway hath ta’en

The spirit wholly; thus the hallow’d light,

To whom I turn’d, flashing, bewray’d its will

To talk yet further with me, and began:

“On this fifth lodgment of the tree, whose life

Is from its top, whose fruit is ever fair

And leaf unwith’ring, blessed spirits abide,

That were below, ere they arriv’d in heav’n,

So mighty in renown, as every muse

Might grace her triumph with them. On the horns

Look therefore of the cross: he, whom I name,

Shall there enact, as doth in summer cloud

Its nimble fire.” Along the cross I saw,

At the repeated name of Joshua,

A splendour gliding; nor, the word was said,

Ere it was done: then, at the naming saw

Of the great Maccabee, another move

With whirling speed; and gladness was the scourge

Unto that top. The next for Charlemagne

And for the peer Orlando, two my gaze

Pursued, intently, as the eye pursues

A falcon flying. Last, along the cross,

William, and Renard, and Duke Godfrey drew

My ken, and Robert Guiscard. And the soul,

Who spake with me among the other lights

Did move away, and mix; and with the choir

Of heav’nly songsters prov’d his tuneful skill.

To Beatrice on my right l bent,

Looking for intimation or by word

Or act, what next behoov’d: and did descry

Such mere effulgence in her eyes, such joy,

It past all former wont. And, as by sense

Of new delight, the man, who perseveres

In good deeds doth perceive from day to day

His virtue growing; I e’en thus perceiv’d

Of my ascent, together with the heav’n

The circuit widen’d, noting the increase

Of beauty in that wonder. Like the change

In a brief moment on some maiden’s cheek,

Which from its fairness doth discharge the weight

Of pudency, that stain’d it; such in her,

And to mine eyes so sudden was the change,

Through silvery whiteness of that temperate star,

Whose sixth orb now enfolded us. I saw,

Within that Jovial cresset, the clear sparks

Of love, that reign’d there, fashion to my view

Our language. And as birds, from river banks

Arisen, now in round, now lengthen’d troop,

Array them in their flight, greeting, as seems,

Their new-found pastures; so, within the lights,

The saintly creatures flying, sang, and made

Now D. now I. now L. figur’d I’ th’ air.
First, singing, to their notes they mov’d, then one

Becoming of these signs, a little while

Did rest them, and were mute. O nymph divine

Of Pegasean race! whose souls, which thou

Inspir’st, mak’st glorious and long-liv’d, as they

Cities and realms by thee! thou with thyself

Inform me; that I may set forth the shapes,

As fancy doth present them. Be thy power

Display’d in this brief song. The characters,

Vocal and consonant, were five-fold seven.

In order each, as they appear’d, I mark’d.

Diligite Justitiam, the first,

Both verb and noun all blazon’d; and the extreme

Qui judicatis terram. In the M.

Of the fifth word they held their station,

Making the star seem silver streak’d with gold.

And on the summit of the M. I saw

Descending other lights, that rested there,

Singing, methinks, their bliss and primal good.

Then, as at shaking of a lighted brand,

Sparkles innumerable on all sides

Rise scatter’d, source of augury to th’ unwise;

Thus more than thousand twinkling lustres hence

Seem’d reascending, and a higher pitch

Some mounting, and some less; e’en as the sun,

Which kindleth them, decreed. And when each one

Had settled in his place, the head and neck

Then saw I of an eagle, lively

Grav’d in that streaky fire. Who painteth there,

Hath none to guide him; of himself he guides;

And every line and texture of the nest

Doth own from him the virtue, fashions it.

The other bright beatitude, that seem’d

Erewhile, with lilied crowning, well content

To over-canopy the M. mov’d forth,

Following gently the impress of the bird.

Sweet star! what glorious and thick-studded gems

Declar’d to me our justice on the earth

To be the effluence of that heav’n, which thou,

Thyself a costly jewel, dost inlay!

Therefore I pray the Sovran Mind, from whom

Thy motion and thy virtue are begun,

That he would look from whence the fog doth rise,

To vitiate thy beam: so that once more

He may put forth his hand ’gainst such, as drive

Their traffic in that sanctuary, whose walls

With miracles and martyrdoms were built.
Ye host of heaven! whose glory I survey l

O beg ye grace for those, that are on earth

All after ill example gone astray.

War once had for its instrument the sword:

But now ’t is made, taking the bread away

Which the good Father locks from none. —And thou,

That writes but to cancel, think, that they,

Who for the vineyard, which thou wastest, died,

Peter and Paul live yet, and mark thy doings.

Thou hast good cause to cry, “My heart so cleaves

To him, that liv’d in solitude remote,

And from the wilds was dragg’d to martyrdom,

I wist not of the fisherman nor Paul.”

CANTO XIX

Before my sight appear’d, with open wings,

The beauteous image, in fruition sweet

Gladdening the thronged spirits. Each did seem

A little ruby, whereon so intense

The sun-beam glow’d that to mine eyes it came

In clear refraction. And that, which next

Befalls me to portray, voice hath not utter’d,

Nor hath ink written, nor in fantasy

Was e’er conceiv’d. For I beheld and heard

The beak discourse; and, what intention form’d

Of many, singly as of one express,

Beginning: “For that I was just and piteous,

l am exalted to this height of glory,

The which no wish exceeds: and there on earth

Have I my memory left, e’en by the bad

Commended, while they leave its course untrod.”

Thus is one heat from many embers felt,

As in that image many were the loves,

And one the voice, that issued from them all.

Whence I address them: “O perennial flowers

Of gladness everlasting! that exhale

In single breath your odours manifold!

Breathe now; and let the hunger be appeas’d,

That with great craving long hath held my soul,

Finding no food on earth. This well I know,

That if there be in heav’n a realm, that shows

In faithful mirror the celestial Justice,

Yours without veil reflects it. Ye discern

The heed, wherewith I do prepare myself

To hearken; ye the doubt that urges me

With such inveterate craving.” Straight I saw,

Like to a falcon issuing from the hood,

That rears his head, and claps him with his wings,

His beauty and his eagerness bewraying.

So saw I move that stately sign, with praise

Of grace divine inwoven and high song

Of inexpressive joy. “He,” it began,

“Who turn’d his compass on the world’s extreme,

And in that space so variously hath wrought,

Both openly, and in secret, in such wise

Could not through all the universe display

Impression of his glory, that the Word

Of his omniscience should not still remain

In infinite excess. In proof whereof,

He first through pride supplanted, who was sum

Of each created being, waited not

For light celestial, and abortive fell.

Whence needs each lesser nature is but scant

Receptacle unto that Good, which knows

No limit, measur’d by itself alone.

Therefore your sight, of th’ omnipresent Mind

A single beam, its origin must own

Surpassing far its utmost potency.

The ken, your world is gifted with, descends

In th’ everlasting Justice as low down,

As eye doth in the sea; which though it mark

The bottom from the shore, in the wide main

Discerns it not; and ne’ertheless it is,

But hidden through its deepness. Light is none,

Save that which cometh from the pure serene

Of ne’er disturbed ether: for the rest,

’Tis darkness all, or shadow of the flesh,

Or else its poison. Here confess reveal’d

That covert, which hath hidden from thy search

The living justice, of the which thou mad’st

Such frequent question; for thou saidst—‘A man

Is born on Indus’ banks, and none is there

Who speaks of Christ, nor who doth read nor write,

And all his inclinations and his acts,

As far as human reason sees, are good,

And he offendeth not in word or deed.

But unbaptiz’d he dies, and void of faith.

Where is the justice that condemns him? where

His blame, if he believeth not?’—What then,

And who art thou, that on the stool wouldst sit

To judge at distance of a thousand miles

With the short-sighted vision of a span?

To him, who subtilizes thus with me,

There would assuredly be room for doubt

Even to wonder, did not the safe word

Of scripture hold supreme authority.

“O animals of clay! O spirits gross I

The primal will, that in itself is good,

Hath from itself, the chief Good, ne’er been mov’d.

Justice consists in consonance with it,

Derivable by no created good,

Whose very cause depends upon its beam.”

As on her nest the stork, that turns about

Unto her young, whom lately she hath fed,

While they with upward eyes do look on her;

So lifted I my gaze; and bending so

The ever-blessed image wav’d its wings,

Lab’ring with such deep counsel. Wheeling round

It warbled, and did say: “As are my notes

To thee, who understand’st them not, such is

Th’ eternal judgment unto mortal ken.”

Then still abiding in that ensign rang’d,

Wherewith the Romans over-awed the world,

Those burning splendours of the Holy Spirit

Took up the strain; and thus it spake again:

“None ever hath ascended to this realm,

Who hath not a believer been in Christ,

Either before or after the blest limbs

Were nail’d upon the wood. But lo! of those

Who call ‘Christ, Christ,’ there shall be many found,

In judgment, further off from him by far,

Than such, to whom his name was never known.

Christians like these the Ethiop shall condemn:

When that the two assemblages shall part;

One rich eternally, the other poor.

“What may the Persians say unto your kings,

When they shall see that volume, in the which

All their dispraise is written, spread to view?

There amidst Albert’s works shall that be read,

Which will give speedy motion to the pen,

When Prague shall mourn her desolated realm.

There shall be read the woe, that he doth work

With his adulterate money on the Seine,

Who by the tusk will perish: there be read

The thirsting pride, that maketh fool alike

The English and Scot, impatient of their bound.

There shall be seen the Spaniard’s luxury,

The delicate living there of the Bohemian,

Who still to worth has been a willing stranger.

The halter of Jerusalem shall see

A unit for his virtue, for his vices

No less a mark than million. He, who guards

The isle of fire by old Anchises honour’d

Shall find his avarice there and cowardice;

And better to denote his littleness,

The writing must be letters maim’d, that speak

Much in a narrow space. All there shall know

His uncle and his brother’s filthy doings,

Who so renown’d a nation and two crowns

Have bastardized. And they, of Portugal

And Norway, there shall be expos’d with him

Of Ratza, who hath counterfeited ill

The coin of Venice. O blest Hungary!

If thou no longer patiently abid’st

Thy ill-entreating! and, O blest Navarre!

If with thy mountainous girdle thou wouldst arm thee

In earnest of that day, e’en now are heard

Wailings and groans in Famagosta’s streets

And Nicosia’s, grudging at their beast,

Who keepeth even footing with the rest.”

CANTO XX

When, disappearing, from our hemisphere,

The world’s enlightener vanishes, and day

On all sides wasteth, suddenly the sky,

Erewhile irradiate only with his beam,

Is yet again unfolded, putting forth

Innumerable lights wherein one shines.

Of such vicissitude in heaven I thought,

As the great sign, that marshaleth the world

And the world’s leaders, in the blessed beak

Was silent; for that all those living lights,

Waxing in splendour, burst forth into songs,

Such as from memory glide and fall away.
Sweet love! that dost apparel thee in smiles,

How lustrous was thy semblance in those sparkles,

Which merely are from holy thoughts inspir’d!

After the precious and bright beaming stones,

That did ingem the sixth light, ceas’d the chiming

Of their angelic bells; methought I heard

The murmuring of a river, that doth fall

From rock to rock transpicuous, making known

The richness of his spring-head: and as sound

Of cistern, at the fret-board, or of pipe,

Is, at the wind-hole, modulate and tun’d;

Thus up the neck, as it were hollow, rose

That murmuring of the eagle, and forthwith

Voice there assum’d, and thence along the beak

Issued in form of words, such as my heart

Did look for, on whose tables I inscrib’d them.

“The part in me, that sees, and bears the sun,,

In mortal eagles,” it began, “must now

Be noted steadfastly: for of the fires,

That figure me, those, glittering in mine eye,

Are chief of all the greatest. This, that shines

Midmost for pupil, was the same, who sang

The Holy Spirit’s song, and bare about

The ark from town to town; now doth he know

The merit of his soul-impassion’d strains

By their well-fitted guerdon. Of the five,

That make the circle of the vision, he

Who to the beak is nearest, comforted

The widow for her son: now doth he know

How dear he costeth not to follow Christ,

Both from experience of this pleasant life,

And of its opposite. He next, who follows

In the circumference, for the over arch,

By true repenting slack’d the pace of death:

Now knoweth he, that the degrees of heav’n

Alter not, when through pious prayer below

Today’s is made tomorrow’s destiny.

The other following, with the laws and me,

To yield the shepherd room, pass’d o’er to Greece,

From good intent producing evil fruit:

Now knoweth he, how all the ill, deriv’d

From his well doing, doth not helm him aught,

Though it have brought destruction on the world.

That, which thou seest in the under bow,

Was William, whom that land bewails, which weeps

For Charles and Frederick living: now he knows

How well is lov’d in heav’n the righteous king,

Which he betokens by his radiant seeming.

Who in the erring world beneath would deem,

That Trojan Ripheus in this round was set

Fifth of the saintly splendours? now he knows

Enough of that, which the world cannot see,

The grace divine, albeit e’en his sight

Reach not its utmost depth.” Like to the lark,

That warbling in the air expatiates long,

Then, trilling out his last sweet melody,

Drops satiate with the sweetness; such appear’d

That image stampt by the’ everlasting pleasure,

Which fashions like itself all lovely things.

I, though my doubting were as manifest,

As is through glass the hue that mantles it,

In silence waited not: for to my lips

“What things are these?” involuntary rush’d,

And forc’d a passage out: whereat I mark’d

A sudden lightening and new revelry.

The eye was kindled: and the blessed sign

No more to keep me wond’ring and suspense,

Replied: “I see that thou believ’st these things,

Because I tell them, but discern’st not how;

So that thy knowledge waits not on thy faith:

As one who knows the name of thing by rote,

But is a stranger to its properties,

Till other’s tongue reveal them. Fervent love

And lively hope with violence assail

The kingdom of the heavens, and overcome

The will of the Most high; not in such sort

As man prevails o’er man; but conquers it,

Because ’t is willing to be conquer’d, still,

Though conquer’d, by its mercy conquering.

“Those, in the eye who live the first and fifth,

Cause thee to marvel, in that thou behold’st

The region of the angels deck’d with them.

They quitted not their bodies, as thou deem’st,

Gentiles but Christians, in firm rooted faith,

This of the feet in future to be pierc’d,

That of feet nail’d already to the cross.

One from the barrier of the dark abyss,

Where never any with good will returns,

Came back unto his bones. Of lively hope

Such was the meed; of lively hope, that wing’d

The prayers sent up to God for his release,

And put power into them to bend his will.

The glorious Spirit, of whom I speak to thee,

A little while returning to the flesh,

Believ’d in him, who had the means to help,

And, in believing, nourish’d such a flame

Of holy love, that at the second death

He was made sharer in our gamesome mirth.

The other, through the riches of that grace,

Which from so deep a fountain doth distil,

As never eye created saw its rising,

Plac’d all his love below on just and right:

Wherefore of grace God op’d in him the eye

To the redemption of mankind to come;

Wherein believing, he endur’d no more

The filth of paganism, and for their ways

Rebuk’d the stubborn nations. The three nymphs,

Whom at the right wheel thou beheldst advancing,

Were sponsors for him more than thousand years

Before baptizing. O how far remov’d,

Predestination! is thy root from such

As see not the First cause entire: and ye,

O mortal men! be wary how ye judge:

For we, who see our Maker, know not yet

The number of the chosen: and esteem

Such scantiness of knowledge our delight:

For all our good is in that primal good

Concentrate, and God’s will and ours are one.”

So, by that form divine, was giv’n to me

Sweet medicine to clear and strengthen sight,

And, as one handling skillfully the harp,

Attendant on some skilful songster’s voice

Bids the chords vibrate, and therein the song

Acquires more pleasure; so, the whilst it spake,

It doth remember me, that I beheld

The pair of blessed luminaries move.

Like the accordant twinkling of two eyes,

Their beamy circlets, dancing to the sounds.

CANTO XXI

Again mine eyes were fix’d on Beatrice,

And with mine eyes my soul, that in her looks

Found all contentment. Yet no smile she wore

And, “Did I smile,” quoth she, “thou wouldst be straight

Like Semele when into ashes turn’d:

For, mounting these eternal palace-stairs,

My beauty, which the loftier it climbs,

As thou hast noted, still doth kindle more,

So shines, that, were no temp’ring interpos’d,

Thy mortal puissance would from its rays

Shrink, as the leaf doth from the thunderbolt.

Into the seventh splendour are we wafted,

That underneath the burning lion’s breast

Beams, in this hour, commingled with his might,

Thy mind be with thine eyes: and in them mirror’d

The shape, which in this mirror shall be shown.”

Whoso can deem, how fondly I had fed

My sight upon her blissful countenance,

May know, when to new thoughts I chang’d, what joy

To do the bidding of my heav’nly guide:

In equal balance poising either weight.

Within the crystal, which records the name,

(As its remoter circle girds the world)

Of that lov’d monarch, in whose happy reign

No ill had power to harm, I saw rear’d up,

In colour like to sun-illumin’d gold.
A ladder, which my ken pursued in vain,

So lofty was the summit; down whose steps

I saw the splendours in such multitude

Descending, ev’ry light in heav’n, methought,

Was shed thence. As the rooks, at dawn of day

Bestirring them to dry their feathers chill,

Some speed their way a-field, and homeward some,

Returning, cross their flight, while some abide

And wheel around their airy lodge; so seem’d

That glitterance, wafted on alternate wing,

As upon certain stair it met, and clash’d

Its shining. And one ling’ring near us, wax’d

So bright, that in my thought: said: “The love,

Which this betokens me, admits no doubt.”

Unwillingly from question I refrain,

To her, by whom my silence and my speech

Are order’d, looking for a sign: whence she,

Who in the sight of Him, that seeth all,

Saw wherefore I was silent, prompted me

T’ indulge the fervent wish; and I began:

“I am not worthy, of my own desert,

That thou shouldst answer me; but for her sake,

Who hath vouchsaf’d my asking, spirit blest!

That in thy joy art shrouded! say the cause,

Which bringeth thee so near: and wherefore, say,

Doth the sweet symphony of Paradise

Keep silence here, pervading with such sounds

Of rapt devotion ev’ry lower sphere?”

“Mortal art thou in hearing as in sight;”

Was the reply: “and what forbade the smile

Of Beatrice interrupts our song.

Only to yield thee gladness of my voice,

And of the light that vests me, I thus far

Descend these hallow’d steps: not that more love

Invites me; for lo! there aloft, as much

Or more of love is witness’d in those flames:

But such my lot by charity assign’d,

That makes us ready servants, as thou seest,

To execute the counsel of the Highest.

“That in this court,” said I, “O sacred lamp!

Love no compulsion needs, but follows free

Th’ eternal Providence, I well discern:

This harder find to deem, why of thy peers

Thou only to this office wert foredoom’d.”

I had not ended, when, like rapid mill,

Upon its centre whirl’d the light; and then

The love, that did inhabit there, replied:

“Splendour eternal, piercing through these folds,

Its virtue to my vision knits, and thus

Supported, lifts me so above myself,

That on the sov’ran essence, which it wells from,

I have the power to gaze: and hence the joy,

Wherewith I sparkle, equaling with my blaze

The keenness of my sight. But not the soul,

That is in heav’n most lustrous, nor the seraph

That hath his eyes most fix’d on God, shall solve

What thou hast ask’d: for in th’ abyss it lies

Of th’ everlasting statute sunk so low,

That no created ken may fathom it.

And, to the mortal world when thou return’st,

Be this reported; that none henceforth dare

Direct his footsteps to so dread a bourn.

The mind, that here is radiant, on the earth

Is wrapt in mist. Look then if she may do,

Below, what passeth her ability,

When she is ta’en to heav’n.” By words like these

Admonish’d, I the question urg’d no more;

And of the spirit humbly sued alone

T’ instruct me of its state. “’Twixt either shore

Of Italy, nor distant from thy land,

A stony ridge ariseth, in such sort,

The thunder doth not lift his voice so high,

They call it Catria: at whose foot a cell

Is sacred to the lonely Eremite,

For worship set apart and holy rites.”

A third time thus it spake; then added: “There

So firmly to God’s service I adher’d,

That with no costlier viands than the juice

Of olives, easily I pass’d the heats

Of summer and the winter frosts, content

In heav’n-ward musings. Rich were the returns

And fertile, which that cloister once was us’d

To render to these heavens: now ’t is fall’n

Into a waste so empty, that ere long

Detection must lay bare its vanity

Pietro Damiano there was I yclept:

Pietro the sinner, when before I dwelt

Beside the Adriatic, in the house

Of our blest Lady. Near upon my close

Of mortal life, through much importuning

I was constrain’d to wear the hat that still

From bad to worse it shifted.—Cephas came;

He came, who was the Holy Spirit’s vessel,

Barefoot and lean, eating their bread, as chanc’d,

At the first table. Modern Shepherd’s need

Those who on either hand may prop and lead them,

So burly are they grown: and from behind

Others to hoist them. Down the palfrey’s sides

Spread their broad mantles, so as both the beasts

Are cover’d with one skin. O patience! thou

That lookst on this and doth endure so long.”

I at those accents saw the splendours down

From step to step alight, and wheel, and wax,

Each circuiting, more beautiful. Round this

They came, and stay’d them; uttered them a shout

So loud, it hath no likeness here: nor I

Wist what it spake, so deaf’ning was the thunder.”

CANTO XXII

Astounded, to the guardian of my steps

I turn’d me, like the chill, who always runs

Thither for succour, where he trusteth most,

And she was like the mother, who her son

Beholding pale and breathless, with her voice

Soothes him, and he is cheer’d; for thus she spake,

Soothing me: “Know’st not thou, thou art in heav’n?

And know’st not thou, whatever is in heav’n,

Is holy, and that nothing there is done

But is done zealously and well? Deem now,

What change in thee the song, and what my smile

had wrought, since thus the shout had pow’r to move thee.

In which couldst thou have understood their prayers,

The vengeance were already known to thee,

Which thou must witness ere thy mortal hour,

The sword of heav’n is not in haste to smite,

Nor yet doth linger, save unto his seeming,

Who in desire or fear doth look for it.

But elsewhere now l bid thee turn thy view;

So shalt thou many a famous spirit behold.”

Mine eyes directing, as she will’d, I saw

A hundred little spheres, that fairer grew

By interchange of splendour. I remain’d,

As one, who fearful of o’er-much presuming,

Abates in him the keenness of desire,

Nor dares to question, when amid those pearls,

One largest and most lustrous onward drew,

That it might yield contentment to my wish;

And from within it these the sounds I heard.

“If thou, like me, beheldst the charity

That burns amongst us, what thy mind conceives,

Were utter’d. But that, ere the lofty bound

Thou reach, expectance may not weary thee,

I will make answer even to the thought,

Which thou hast such respect of. In old days,

That mountain, at whose side Cassino rests,

Was on its height frequented by a race

Deceived and ill dispos’d: and I it was,

Who thither carried first the name of Him,

Who brought the soul-subliming truth to man.

And such a speeding grace shone over me,

That from their impious worship I reclaim’d

The dwellers round about, who with the world

Were in delusion lost. These other flames,

The spirits of men contemplative, were all

Enliven’d by that warmth, whose kindly force

Gives birth to flowers and fruits of holiness.

Here is Macarius; Romoaldo here:

And here my brethren, who their steps refrain’d

Within the cloisters, and held firm their heart.”

I answ’ring, thus; “Thy gentle words and kind,

And this the cheerful semblance, I behold

Not unobservant, beaming in ye all,

Have rais’d assurance in me, wakening it

Full-blossom’d in my bosom, as a rose

Before the sun, when the consummate flower

Has spread to utmost amplitude. Of thee

Therefore entreat I, father! to declare

If I may gain such favour, as to gaze

Upon thine image, by no covering veil’d.”

“Brother!” he thus rejoin’d, “in the last sphere

Expect completion of thy lofty aim,

For there on each desire completion waits,

And there on mine: where every aim is found

Perfect, entire, and for fulfillment ripe.

There all things are as they have ever been:

For space is none to bound, nor pole divides,

Our ladder reaches even to that clime,

And so at giddy distance mocks thy view.

Thither the Patriarch Jacob saw it stretch

Its topmost round, when it appear’d to him

With angels laden. But to mount it now

None lifts his foot from earth: and hence my rule

Is left a profitless stain upon the leaves;

The walls, for abbey rear’d, turned into dens,

The cowls to sacks choak’d up with musty meal.

Foul usury doth not more lift itself

Against God’s pleasure, than that fruit which makes

The hearts of monks so wanton: for whate’er

Is in the church’s keeping, all pertains.

To such, as sue for heav’n’s sweet sake, and not

To those who in respect of kindred claim,

Or on more vile allowance. Mortal flesh

Is grown so dainty, good beginnings last not

From the oak’s birth, unto the acorn’s setting.

His convent Peter founded without gold

Or silver; I with pray’rs and fasting mine;

And Francis his in meek humility.

And if thou note the point, whence each proceeds,

Then look what it hath err’d to, thou shalt find

The white grown murky. Jordan was turn’d back;

And a less wonder, then the refluent sea,

May at God’s pleasure work amendment here.”

So saying, to his assembly back he drew:

And they together cluster’d into one,

Then all roll’d upward like an eddying wind.

The sweet dame beckon’d me to follow them:

And, by that influence only, so prevail’d

Over my nature, that no natural motion,

Ascending or descending here below,

Had, as I mounted, with my pennon vied.

So, reader, as my hope is to return

Unto the holy triumph, for the which

I ofttimes wail my sins, and smite my breast,

Thou hadst been longer drawing out and thrusting

Thy finger in the fire, than I was, ere

The sign, that followeth Taurus, I beheld,

And enter’d its precinct. O glorious stars!

O light impregnate with exceeding virtue!

To whom whate’er of genius lifteth me

Above the vulgar, grateful I refer;

With ye the parent of all mortal life

Arose and set, when I did first inhale

The Tuscan air; and afterward, when grace

Vouchsaf’d me entrance to the lofty wheel

That in its orb impels ye, fate decreed

My passage at your clime. To you my soul

Devoutly sighs, for virtue even now

To meet the hard emprize that draws me on.

“Thou art so near the sum of blessedness,”

Said Beatrice, “that behooves thy ken

Be vigilant and clear. And, to this end,

Or even thou advance thee further, hence

Look downward, and contemplate, what a world

Already stretched under our feet there lies:

So as thy heart may, in its blithest mood,

Present itself to the triumphal throng,

Which through the’ etherial concave comes rejoicing.”

I straight obey’d; and with mine eye return’d

Through all the seven spheres, and saw this globe

So pitiful of semblance, that perforce

It moved my smiles: and him in truth I hold

For wisest, who esteems it least: whose thoughts

Elsewhere are fix’d, him worthiest call and best.

I saw the daughter of Latona shine

Without the shadow, whereof late I deem’d

That dense and rare were cause. Here I sustain’d

The visage, Hyperion! of thy sun;

And mark’d, how near him with their circle, round

Move Maia and Dione; here discern’d

Jove’s tempering ’twixt his sire and son; and hence

Their changes and their various aspects

Distinctly scann’d. Nor might I not descry

Of all the seven, how bulky each, how swift;

Nor of their several distances not learn.

This petty area (o’er the which we stride

So fiercely), as along the eternal twins

I wound my way, appear’d before me all,

Forth from the havens stretch’d unto the hills.

Then to the beauteous eyes mine eyes return’d.

CANTO XXIII

E’en as the bird, who midst the leafy bower

Has, in her nest, sat darkling through the night,

With her sweet brood, impatient to descry

Their wished looks, and to bring home their food,

In the fond quest unconscious of her toil:

She, of the time prevenient, on the spray,

That overhangs their couch, with wakeful gaze

Expects the sun; nor ever, till the dawn,

Removeth from the east her eager ken;

So stood the dame erect, and bent her glance

Wistfully on that region, where the sun

Abateth most his speed; that, seeing her

Suspense and wand’ring, I became as one,

In whom desire is waken’d, and the hope

Of somewhat new to come fills with delight.

Short space ensued; I was not held, I say,

Long in expectance, when I saw the heav’n

Wax more and more resplendent; and, “Behold,”

Cried Beatrice, “the triumphal hosts

Of Christ, and all the harvest reap’d at length

Of thy ascending up these spheres.” Meseem’d,

That, while she spake her image all did burn,

And in her eyes such fullness was of joy,

And I am fain to pass unconstrued by.

As in the calm full moon, when Trivia smiles,

In peerless beauty, ’mid th’ eternal nympus,

That paint through all its gulfs the blue profound

In bright pre-eminence so saw I there,

O’er million lamps a sun, from whom all drew

Their radiance as from ours the starry train:

And through the living light so lustrous glow’d

The substance, that my ken endur’d it not.

O Beatrice! sweet and precious guide!

Who cheer’d me with her comfortable words!

“Against the virtue, that o’erpow’reth thee,

Avails not to resist. Here is the might,

And here the wisdom, which did open lay

The path, that had been yearned for so long,

Betwixt the heav’n and earth.” Like to the fire,

That, in a cloud imprison’d doth break out

Expansive, so that from its womb enlarg’d,

It falleth against nature to the ground;

Thus in that heav’nly banqueting my soul

Outgrew herself; and, in the transport lost.

Holds now remembrance none of what she was.

“Ope thou thine eyes, and mark me: thou hast seen

Things, that empower thee to sustain my smile.”

I was as one, when a forgotten dream

Doth come across him, and he strives in vain

To shape it in his fantasy again,

Whenas that gracious boon was proffer’d me,

Which never may be cancel’d from the book,

Wherein the past is written. Now were all

Those tongues to sound, that have on sweetest milk

Of Polyhymnia and her sisters fed

And fatten’d, not with all their help to boot,

Unto the thousandth parcel of the truth,

My song might shadow forth that saintly smile,

flow merely in her saintly looks it wrought.

And with such figuring of Paradise

The sacred strain must leap, like one, that meets

A sudden interruption to his road.

But he, who thinks how ponderous the theme,

And that ’t is lain upon a mortal shoulder,

May pardon, if it tremble with the burden.

The track, our ventrous keel must furrow, brooks

No unribb’d pinnace, no self-sparing pilot.

“Why doth my face,” said Beatrice, “thus

Enamour thee, as that thou dost not turn

Unto the beautiful garden, blossoming

Beneath the rays of Christ? Here is the rose,

Wherein the word divine was made incarnate;

And here the lilies, by whose odour known

The way of life was follow’d.” Prompt I heard

Her bidding, and encounter once again

The strife of aching vision. As erewhile,

Through glance of sunlight, stream’d through broken cloud,

Mine eyes a flower-besprinkled mead have seen,

Though veil’d themselves in shade; so saw I there

Legions of splendours, on whom burning rays

Shed lightnings from above, yet saw I not

The fountain whence they flow’d. O gracious virtue!

Thou, whose broad stamp is on them, higher up

Thou didst exalt thy glory to give room

To my o’erlabour’d sight: when at the name

Of that fair flower, whom duly I invoke

Both morn and eve, my soul, with all her might

Collected, on the goodliest ardour fix’d.

And, as the bright dimensions of the star

In heav’n excelling, as once here on earth

Were, in my eyeballs lively portray’d,

Lo! from within the sky a cresset fell,

Circling in fashion of a diadem,

And girt the star, and hov’ring round it wheel’d.

Whatever melody sounds sweetest here,

And draws the spirit most unto itself,

Might seem a rent cloud when it grates the thunder,

Compar’d unto the sounding of that lyre,

Wherewith the goodliest sapphire, that inlays

The floor of heav’n, was crown’d. “Angelic Love,

I am, who thus with hov’ring flight enwheel

The lofty rapture from that womb inspir’d,

Where our desire did dwell: and round thee so,

Lady of Heav’n! will hover; long as thou

Thy Son shalt follow, and diviner joy

Shall from thy presence gild the highest sphere.”

Such close was to the circling melody:

And, as it ended, all the other lights

Took up the strain, and echoed Mary’s name.

The robe, that with its regal folds enwraps

The world, and with the nearer breath of God

Doth burn and quiver, held so far retir’d

Its inner hem and skirting over us,

That yet no glimmer of its majesty

Had stream’d unto me: therefore were mine eyes

Unequal to pursue the crowned flame,

That rose and sought its natal seed of fire;

And like to babe, that stretches forth its arms

For very eagerness towards the breast,

After the milk is taken; so outstretch’d

Their wavy summits all the fervent band,

Through zealous love to Mary: then in view

There halted, and “Regina Coeli” sang

So sweetly, the delight hath left me never.

O what o’erflowing plenty is up-pil’d

In those rich-laden coffers, which below

Sow’d the good seed, whose harvest now they keep.

Here are the treasures tasted, that with tears

Were in the Babylonian exile won,

When gold had fail’d them. Here in synod high

Of ancient council with the new conven’d,

Under the Son of Mary and of God,

Victorious he his mighty triumph holds,

To whom the keys of glory were assign’d.

CANTO XXIV

“O ye! in chosen fellowship advanc’d

To the great supper of the blessed Lamb,

Whereon who feeds hath every wish fulfill’d!

If to this man through God’s grace be vouchsaf’d

Foretaste of that, which from your table falls,

Or ever death his fated term prescribe;

Be ye not heedless of his urgent will;

But may some influence of your sacred dews

Sprinkle him. Of the fount ye alway drink,

Whence flows what most he craves.” Beatrice spake,

And the rejoicing spirits, like to spheres

On firm-set poles revolving, trail’d a blaze

Of comet splendour; and as wheels, that wind

Their circles in the horologe, so work

The stated rounds, that to th’ observant eye

The first seems still, and, as it flew, the last;

E’en thus their carols weaving variously,

They by the measure pac’d, or swift, or slow,

Made me to rate the riches of their joy.

From that, which I did note in beauty most

Excelling, saw I issue forth a flame

So bright, as none was left more goodly there.

Round Beatrice thrice it wheel’d about,

With so divine a song, that fancy’s ear

Records it not; and the pen passeth on

And leaves a blank: for that our mortal speech,

Nor e’en the inward shaping of the brain,

Hath colours fine enough to trace such folds.

“O saintly sister mine! thy prayer devout

Is with so vehement affection urg’d,

Thou dost unbind me from that beauteous sphere.”

Such were the accents towards my lady breath’d

From that blest ardour, soon as it was stay’d:

To whom she thus: “O everlasting light

Of him, within whose mighty grasp our Lord

Did leave the keys, which of this wondrous bliss

He bare below! tent this man, as thou wilt,

With lighter probe or deep, touching the faith,

By the which thou didst on the billows walk.

If he in love, in hope, and in belief,

Be steadfast, is not hid from thee: for thou

Hast there thy ken, where all things are beheld

In liveliest portraiture. But since true faith

Has peopled this fair realm with citizens,

Meet is, that to exalt its glory more,

Thou in his audience shouldst thereof discourse.”

Like to the bachelor, who arms himself,

And speaks not, till the master have propos’d

The question, to approve, and not to end it;

So I, in silence, arm’d me, while she spake,

Summoning up each argument to aid;

As was behooveful for such questioner,

And such profession: “As good Christian ought,

Declare thee, What is faith?” Whereat I rais’d

My forehead to the light, whence this had breath’d,

Then turn’d to Beatrice, and in her looks

Approval met, that from their inmost fount

I should unlock the waters. “May the grace,

That giveth me the captain of the church

For confessor," said I, "vouchsafe to me

Apt utterance for my thoughts!" then added: "Sire!

E'en as set down by the unerring style

Of thy dear brother, who with thee conspir'd

To bring Rome in unto the way of life,

Faith of things hop'd is substance, and the proof

Of things not seen; and herein doth consist

Methinks its essence,"—"Rightly hast thou deem'd,"

Was answer'd: "if thou well discern, why first

He hath defin'd it, substance, and then proof."

"The deep things," I replied, "which here I scan

Distinctly, are below from mortal eye

So hidden, they have in belief alone

Their being, on which credence hope sublime

Is built; and therefore substance it intends.

And inasmuch as we must needs infer

From such belief our reasoning, all respect

To other view excluded, hence of proof

Th’ intention is deriv’d.” Forthwith I heard:

“If thus, whate’er by learning men attain,

Were understood, the sophist would want room

To exercise his wit.” So breath’d the flame

Of love: then added: “Current is the coin

Thou utter’st, both in weight and in alloy.

But tell me, if thou hast it in thy purse.”

“Even so glittering and so round,” said I,

“I not a whit misdoubt of its assay.”

Next issued from the deep imbosom’d splendour:

“Say, whence the costly jewel, on the which

Is founded every virtue, came to thee.”

“The flood,” I answer’d, “from the Spirit of God

Rain’d down upon the ancient bond and new,—

Here is the reas’ning, that convinceth me

So feelingly, each argument beside

Seems blunt and forceless in comparison.”

Then heard I: “Wherefore holdest thou that each,

The elder proposition and the new,

Which so persuade thee, are the voice of heav’n?”

“The works, that follow’d, evidence their truth;”

I answer’d: “Nature did not make for these

The iron hot, or on her anvil mould them.”

“Who voucheth to thee of the works themselves,”

Was the reply, “that they in very deed

Are that they purport? None hath sworn so to thee.”

“That all the world,” said I, “should have been turn’d

To Christian, and no miracle been wrought,

Would in itself be such a miracle,

The rest were not an hundredth part so great.

E’en thou wentst forth in poverty and hunger

To set the goodly plant, that from the vine,

It once was, now is grown unsightly bramble.”

That ended, through the high celestial court

Resounded all the spheres. “Praise we one God!”

In song of most unearthly melody.

And when that Worthy thus, from branch to branch,

Examining, had led me, that we now

Approach’d the topmost bough, he straight resum’d;

“The grace, that holds sweet dalliance with thy soul,

So far discreetly hath thy lips unclos’d

That, whatsoe’er has past them, I commend.

Behooves thee to express, what thou believ’st,

The next, and whereon thy belief hath grown.”

“O saintly sire and spirit!” I began,

“Who seest that, which thou didst so believe,

As to outstrip feet younger than thine own,

Toward the sepulchre? thy will is here,

That I the tenour of my creed unfold;

And thou the cause of it hast likewise ask’d.

And I reply: I in one God believe,

One sole eternal Godhead, of whose love

All heav’n is mov’d, himself unmov’d the while.

Nor demonstration physical alone,

Or more intelligential and abstruse,

Persuades me to this faith; but from that truth

It cometh to me rather, which is shed

Through Moses, the rapt Prophets, and the Psalms.

The Gospel, and that ye yourselves did write,

When ye were gifted of the Holy Ghost.

In three eternal Persons I believe,

Essence threefold and one, mysterious league

Of union absolute, which, many a time,

The word of gospel lore upon my mind

Imprints: and from this germ, this firstling spark,

The lively flame dilates, and like heav’n’s star

Doth glitter in me.” As the master hears,

Well pleas’d, and then enfoldeth in his arms

The servant, who hath joyful tidings brought,

And having told the errand keeps his peace;

Thus benediction uttering with song

Soon as my peace I held, compass’d me thrice

The apostolic radiance, whose behest

Had op’d lips; so well their answer pleas’d.

CANTO XXV

If e’er the sacred poem that hath made

Both heav’n and earth copartners in its toil,

And with lean abstinence, through many a year,

Faded my brow, be destin’d to prevail

Over the cruelty, which bars me forth

Of the fair sheep-fold, where a sleeping lamb

The wolves set on and fain had worried me,

With other voice and fleece of other grain

I shall forthwith return, and, standing up

At my baptismal font, shall claim the wreath

Due to the poet’s temples: for I there

First enter’d on the faith which maketh souls

Acceptable to God: and, for its sake,

Peter had then circled my forehead thus.

Next from the squadron, whence had issued forth

The first fruit of Christ’s vicars on the earth,

Toward us mov’d a light, at view whereof

My Lady, full of gladness, spake to me:

“Lo! lo! behold the peer of mickle might,

That makes Falicia throng’d with visitants!”

As when the ring-dove by his mate alights,

In circles each about the other wheels,

And murmuring cooes his fondness; thus saw I

One, of the other great and glorious prince,

With kindly greeting hail’d, extolling both

Their heavenly banqueting; but when an end

Was to their gratulation, silent, each,

Before me sat they down, so burning bright,

I could not look upon them. Smiling then,

Beatrice spake: “O life in glory shrin’d!”

Who didst the largess of our kingly court

Set down with faithful pen! let now thy voice

Of hope the praises in this height resound.

For thou, who figur’st them in shapes, as clear,

As Jesus stood before thee, well can’st speak them.”

“Lift up thy head, and be thou strong in trust:

For that, which hither from the mortal world

Arriveth, must be ripen’d in our beam.”

Such cheering accents from the second flame

Assur’d me; and mine eyes I lifted up

Unto the mountains that had bow’d them late

With over-heavy burden. “Sith our Liege

Wills of his grace that thou, or ere thy death,

In the most secret council, with his lords

Shouldst be confronted, so that having view’d

The glories of our court, thou mayst therewith

Thyself, and all who hear, invigorate

With hope, that leads to blissful end; declare,

What is that hope, how it doth flourish in thee,

And whence thou hadst it?” Thus proceeding still,

The second light: and she, whose gentle love

My soaring pennons in that lofty flight

Escorted, thus preventing me, rejoin’d:

Among her sons, not one more full of hope,

Hath the church militant: so ’t is of him

Recorded in the sun, whose liberal orb

Enlighteneth all our tribe: and ere his term

Of warfare, hence permitted he is come,

From Egypt to Jerusalem, to see.

The other points, both which thou hast inquir’d,

Not for more knowledge, but that he may tell

How dear thou holdst the virtue, these to him

Leave I; for he may answer thee with ease,

And without boasting, so God give him grace.”

Like to the scholar, practis’d in his task,

Who, willing to give proof of diligence,

Seconds his teacher gladly, “Hope,” said I,

“Is of the joy to come a sure expectance,

Th’ effect of grace divine and merit preceding.

This light from many a star visits my heart,

But flow’d to me the first from him, who sang

The songs of the Supreme, himself supreme

Among his tuneful brethren. ‘Let all hope

In thee,’ so speak his anthem, ‘who have known

Thy name;’ and with my faith who know not that?

From thee, the next, distilling from his spring,

In thine epistle, fell on me the drops

So plenteously, that I on others shower

The influence of their dew.” Whileas I spake,

A lamping, as of quick and vollied lightning,

Within the bosom of that mighty sheen,

Play’d tremulous; then forth these accents breath’d:

“Love for the virtue which attended me

E’en to the palm, and issuing from the field,

Glows vigorous yet within me, and inspires

To ask of thee, whom also it delights;

What promise thou from hope in chief dost win.”

“Both scriptures, new and ancient,” I reply’d;

“Propose the mark (which even now I view)

For souls belov’d of God. Isaias saith,

‘That, in their own land, each one must be clad

In twofold vesture; and their proper lands this delicious life.’

In terms more full,

And clearer far, thy brother hath set forth

This revelation to us, where he tells

Of the white raiment destin’d to the saints.”

And, as the words were ending, from above,

“They hope in thee,” first heard we cried: whereto

Answer’d the carols all. Amidst them next,

A light of so clear amplitude emerg’d,

That winter’s month were but a single day,

Were such a crystal in the Cancer’s sign.

Like as a virgin riseth up, and goes,

And enters on the mazes of the dance,

Though gay, yet innocent of worse intent,

Than to do fitting honour to the bride;

So I beheld the new effulgence come

Unto the other two, who in a ring

Wheel’d, as became their rapture. In the dance

And in the song it mingled. And the dame

Held on them fix’d her looks: e’en as the spouse

Silent and moveless. “This is he, who lay

Upon the bosom of our pelican:

This he, into whose keeping from the cross

The mighty charge was given.” Thus she spake,

Yet therefore naught the more remov’d her Sight

From marking them, or ere her words began,

Or when they clos’d. As he, who looks intent,

And strives with searching ken, how he may see

The sun in his eclipse, and, through desire

Of seeing, loseth power of sight: so I

Peer’d on that last resplendence, while I heard:

“Why dazzlest thou thine eyes in seeking that,

Which here abides not? Earth my body is,

In earth: and shall be, with the rest, so long,

As till our number equal the decree

Of the Most High. The two that have ascended,

In this our blessed cloister, shine alone

With the two garments. So report below.”

As when, for ease of labour, or to shun

Suspected peril at a whistle’s breath,

The oars, erewhile dash’d frequent in the wave,

All rest; the flamy circle at that voice

So rested, and the mingling sound was still,

Which from the trinal band soft-breathing rose.

I turn’d, but ah! how trembled in my thought,

When, looking at my side again to see

Beatrice, I descried her not, although

Not distant, on the happy coast she stood.

CANTO XXVI

With dazzled eyes, whilst wond’ring I remain’d,

Forth of the beamy flame which dazzled me,

Issued a breath, that in attention mute

Detain’d me; and these words it spake: “’T were well,

That, long as till thy vision, on my form

O’erspent, regain its virtue, with discourse

Thou compensate the brief delay. Say then,

Beginning, to what point thy soul aspires:”
“And meanwhile rest assur’d, that sight in thee

Is but o’erpowered a space, not wholly quench’d:

Since thy fair guide and lovely, in her look

Hath potency, the like to that which dwelt

In Ananias’ hand.” I answering thus:

“Be to mine eyes the remedy or late

Or early, at her pleasure; for they were

The gates, at which she enter’d, and did light

Her never dying fire. My wishes here

Are centered; in this palace is the weal,

That Alpha and Omega, is to all

The lessons love can read me.” Yet again

The voice which had dispers’d my fear, when daz’d

With that excess, to converse urg’d, and spake:

“Behooves thee sift more narrowly thy terms,

And say, who level’d at this scope thy bow.”

“Philosophy,” said I, “hath arguments,

And this place hath authority enough

T’ imprint in me such love: for, of constraint,

Good, inasmuch as we perceive the good,

Kindles our love, and in degree the more,

As it comprises more of goodness in ’t.

The essence then, where such advantage is,

That each good, found without it, is naught else

But of his light the beam, must needs attract

The soul of each one, loving, who the truth

Discerns, on which this proof is built. Such truth

Learn I from him, who shows me the first love

Of all intelligential substances

Eternal: from his voice I learn, whose word

Is truth, that of himself to Moses saith,

‘I will make all my good before thee pass.’

Lastly from thee I learn, who chief proclaim’st,

E’en at the outset of thy heralding,

In mortal ears the mystery of heav’n.”

“Through human wisdom, and th’ authority

Therewith agreeing,” heard I answer’d, “keep

The choicest of thy love for God. But say,

If thou yet other cords within thee feel’st

That draw thee towards him; so that thou report

How many are the fangs, with which this love

Is grappled to thy soul.” I did not miss,

To what intent the eagle of our Lord

Had pointed his demand; yea noted well

Th’ avowal, which he led to; and resum’d:

“All grappling bonds, that knit the heart to God,

Confederate to make fast our clarity.

The being of the world, and mine own being,

The death which he endur’d that I should live,

And that, which all the faithful hope, as I do,

To the foremention’d lively knowledge join’d,

Have from the sea of ill love sav’d my bark,

And on the coast secur’d it of the right.

As for the leaves, that in the garden bloom,

My love for them is great, as is the good

Dealt by th’ eternal hand, that tends them all.”

I ended, and therewith a song most sweet

Rang through the spheres; and “Holy, holy, holy,”

Accordant with the rest my lady sang.

And as a sleep is broken and dispers’d

Through sharp encounter of the nimble light,

With the eye’s spirit running forth to meet

The ray, from membrane on to the membrane urg’d;

And the upstartled wight loathes that he sees;

So, at his sudden waking, he misdeems

Of all around him, till assurance waits

On better judgment: thus the saintly came

Drove from before mine eyes the motes away,

With the resplendence of her own, that cast

Their brightness downward, thousand miles below.

Whence I my vision, clearer shall before,

Recover’d; and, well nigh astounded, ask’d

Of a fourth light, that now with us I saw.

And Beatrice: “The first diving soul,

That ever the first virtue fram’d, admires

Within these rays his Maker.” Like the leaf,

That bows its lithe top till the blast is blown;

By its own virtue rear’d then stands aloof;

So I, the whilst she said, awe-stricken bow’d.

Then eagerness to speak embolden’d me;

And I began: “O fruit! that wast alone

Mature, when first engender’d! Ancient father!

That doubly seest in every wedded bride

Thy daughter by affinity and blood!

Devoutly as I may, I pray thee hold

Converse with me: my will thou seest; and I,

More speedily to hear thee, tell it not.”

It chanceth oft some animal bewrays,

Through the sleek cov’ring of his furry coat.

The fondness, that stirs in him and conforms

His outside seeming to the cheer within:

And in like guise was Adam’s spirit mov’d

To joyous mood, that through the covering shone,

Transparent, when to pleasure me it spake:

“No need thy will be told, which I untold

Better discern, than thou whatever thing

Thou holdst most certain: for that will I see

In Him, who is truth’s mirror, and Himself

Parhelion unto all things, and naught else

To him. This wouldst thou hear; how long since God

Plac’d me high garden, from whose hounds

She led me up in this ladder, steep and long;

What space endur’d my season of delight;

Whence truly sprang the wrath that banish’d me;

And what the language, which I spake and fram’d

Not that I tasted of the tree, my son,

Was in itself the cause of that exile,

But only my transgressing of the mark

Assign’d me. There, whence at thy lady’s hest

The Mantuan mov’d him, still was I debarr’d

This council, till the sun had made complete,

Four thousand and three hundred rounds and twice,

His annual journey; and, through every light

In his broad pathway, saw I him return,

Thousand save sev’nty times, the whilst I dwelt

Upon the earth. The language I did use

Was worn away, or ever Nimrod’s race

Their unaccomplishable work began.

For naught, that man inclines to, ere was lasting,

Left by his reason free, and variable,

As is the sky that sways him. That he speaks,

Is nature’s prompting: whether thus or thus,

She leaves to you, as ye do most affect it.

Ere I descended into hell’s abyss,

El was the name on earth of the Chief Good,

Whose joy enfolds me: Eli then ’t was call’d

And so beseemeth: for, in mortals, use

Is as the leaf upon the bough; that goes,

And other comes instead. Upon the mount

Most high above the waters, all my life,

Both innocent and guilty, did but reach

From the first hour, to that which cometh next

(As the sun changes quarter), to the sixth.”

CANTO XXVII

Then “Glory to the Father, to the Son,

And to the Holy Spirit,” rang aloud

Throughout all Paradise, that with the song

My spirit reel’d, so passing sweet the strain:

And what I saw was equal ecstasy;

One universal smile it seem’d of all things,

Joy past compare, gladness unutterable,

Imperishable life of peace and love,

Exhaustless riches and unmeasur’d bliss.

Before mine eyes stood the four torches lit;

And that, which first had come, began to wax

In brightness, and in semblance such became,

As Jove might be, if he and Mars were birds,

And interchang’d their plumes. Silence ensued,

Through the blest quire, by Him, who here appoints

Vicissitude of ministry, enjoin’d;

When thus I heard: “Wonder not, if my hue

Be chang’d; for, while I speak, these shalt thou see

All in like manner change with me. My place

He who usurps on earth (my place, ay, mine,

Which in the presence of the Son of God

Is void), the same hath made my cemetery

A common sewer of puddle and of blood:

The more below his triumph, who from hence

Malignant fell.” Such colour, as the sun,

At eve or morning, paints an adverse cloud,

Then saw I sprinkled over all the sky.

And as th’ unblemish’d dame, who in herself

Secure of censure, yet at bare report

Of other’s failing, shrinks with maiden fear;

So Beatrice in her semblance chang’d:

And such eclipse in heav’n methinks was seen,

When the Most Holy suffer’d. Then the words

Proceeded, with voice, alter’d from itself

So clean, the semblance did not alter more.

“Not to this end was Christ’s spouse with my blood,

With that of Linus, and of Cletus fed:

That she might serve for purchase of base gold:

But for the purchase of this happy life

Did Sextus, Pius, and Callixtus bleed,

And Urban, they, whose doom was not without

Much weeping seal’d. No purpose was of our

That on the right hand of our successors

Part of the Christian people should be set,

And part upon their left; nor that the keys,

Which were vouchsaf’d me, should for ensign serve

Unto the banners, that do levy war

On the baptiz’d: nor I, for sigil-mark

Set upon sold and lying privileges;

Which makes me oft to bicker and turn red.

In shepherd’s clothing greedy wolves below

Range wide o’er all the pastures. Arm of God!

Why longer sleepst thou? Caorsines and Gascona

Prepare to quaff our blood. O good beginning

To what a vile conclusion must thou stoop!

But the high providence, which did defend

Through Scipio the world’s glory unto Rome,

Will not delay its succour: and thou, son,

Who through thy mortal weight shall yet again

Return below, open thy lips, nor hide

What is by me not hidden.” As a Hood

Of frozen vapours streams adown the air,

What time the she-goat with her skiey horn

Touches the sun; so saw I there stream wide

The vapours, who with us had linger’d late

And with glad triumph deck th’ ethereal cope.

Onward my sight their semblances pursued;

So far pursued, as till the space between

From its reach sever’d them: whereat the guide

Celestial, marking me no more intent

On upward gazing, said, “Look down and see

What circuit thou hast compass’d.” From the hour

When I before had cast my view beneath,

All the first region overpast I saw,

Which from the midmost to the bound’ry winds;

That onward thence from Gades I beheld

The unwise passage of Laertes’ son,

And hitherward the shore, where thou, Europa!

Mad’st thee a joyful burden: and yet more

Of this dim spot had seen, but that the sun,

A constellation off and more, had ta’en

His progress in the zodiac underneath.

Then by the spirit, that doth never leave

Its amorous dalliance with my lady’s looks,

Back with redoubled ardour were mine eyes

Led unto her: and from her radiant smiles,

Whenas I turn’d me, pleasure so divine

Did lighten on me, that whatever bait

Or art or nature in the human flesh,

Or in its limn’d resemblance, can combine

Through greedy eyes to take the soul withal,

Were to her beauty nothing. Its boon influence

From the fair nest of Leda rapt me forth,

And wafted on into the swiftest heav’n.

What place for entrance Beatrice chose,

I may not say, so uniform was all,

Liveliest and loftiest. She my secret wish

Divin’d; and with such gladness, that God’s love

Seem’d from her visage shining, thus began:

“Here is the goal, whence motion on his race

Starts; motionless the centre, and the rest

All mov’d around. Except the soul divine,

Place in this heav’n is none, the soul divine,

Wherein the love, which ruleth o’er its orb,

Is kindled, and the virtue that it sheds;

One circle, light and love, enclasping it,

As this doth clasp the others; and to Him,

Who draws the bound, its limit only known.

Measur’d itself by none, it doth divide

Motion to all, counted unto them forth,

As by the fifth or half ye count forth ten.

The vase, wherein time’s roots are plung’d, thou seest,

Look elsewhere for the leaves. O mortal lust!

That canst not lift thy head above the waves

Which whelm and sink thee down! The will in man

Bears goodly blossoms; but its ruddy promise

Is, by the dripping of perpetual rain,

Made mere abortion: faith and innocence

Are met with but in babes, each taking leave

Ere cheeks with down are sprinkled; he, that fasts,

While yet a stammerer, with his tongue let loose

Gluts every food alike in every moon.

One yet a babbler, loves and listens to

His mother; but no sooner hath free use

Of speech, than he doth wish her in her grave.

So suddenly doth the fair child of him,

Whose welcome is the morn and eve his parting,

To negro blackness change her virgin white.

“Thou, to abate thy wonder, note that none

Bears rule in earth, and its frail family

Are therefore wand’rers. Yet before the date,

When through the hundredth in his reck’ning drops

Pale January must be shor’d aside

From winter’s calendar, these heav’nly spheres

Shall roar so loud, that fortune shall be fain

To turn the poop, where she hath now the prow;

So that the fleet run onward; and true fruit,

Expected long, shall crown at last the bloom!”

CANTO XXVIII

So she who doth imparadise my soul,

Had drawn the veil from off our pleasant life,

And bar’d the truth of poor mortality;

When lo! as one who, in a mirror, spies

The shining of a flambeau at his back,

Lit sudden ore he deem of its approach,

And turneth to resolve him, if the glass

Have told him true, and sees the record faithful

As note is to its metre; even thus,

I well remember, did befall to me,

Looking upon the beauteous eyes, whence love

Had made the leash to take me. As I turn’d;

And that, which, in their circles, none who spies,

Can miss of, in itself apparent, struck

On mine; a point I saw, that darted light

So sharp, no lid, unclosing, may bear up

Against its keenness. The least star we view

From hence, had seem’d a moon, set by its side,

As star by side of star. And so far off,

Perchance, as is the halo from the light

Which paints it, when most dense the vapour spreads,

There wheel’d about the point a circle of fire,

More rapid than the motion, which first girds

The world. Then, circle after circle, round

Enring’d each other; till the seventh reach’d

Circumference so ample, that its bow,

Within the span of Juno’s messenger,

lied scarce been held entire. Beyond the sev’nth,

Follow’d yet other two. And every one,

As more in number distant from the first,

Was tardier in motion; and that glow’d

With flame most pure, that to the sparkle’ of truth

Was nearest, as partaking most, methinks,

Of its reality. The guide belov’d

Saw me in anxious thought suspense, and spake:

“Heav’n, and all nature, hangs upon that point.

The circle thereto most conjoin’d observe;

And know, that by intenser love its course

Is to this swiftness wing’d.” To whom I thus:

“It were enough; nor should I further seek,

Had I but witness’d order, in the world

Appointed, such as in these wheels is seen.

But in the sensible world such diff’rence is,

That is each round shows more divinity,

As each is wider from the centre. Hence,

If in this wondrous and angelic temple,

That hath for confine only light and love,

My wish may have completion I must know,

Wherefore such disagreement is between

Th’ exemplar and its copy: for myself,

Contemplating, I fail to pierce the cause.”

“It is no marvel, if thy fingers foil’d

Do leave the knot untied: so hard ’t is grown

For want of tenting.” Thus she said: “But take,”

She added, “if thou wish thy cure, my words,

And entertain them subtly. Every orb

Corporeal, doth proportion its extent

Unto the virtue through its parts diffus’d.

The greater blessedness preserves the more.

The greater is the body (if all parts

Share equally) the more is to preserve.

Therefore the circle, whose swift course enwheels

The universal frame answers to that,

Which is supreme in knowledge and in love

Thus by the virtue, not the seeming, breadth

Of substance, measure, thou shalt see the heav’ns,

Each to the’ intelligence that ruleth it,

Greater to more, and smaller unto less,

Suited in strict and wondrous harmony.”

As when the sturdy north blows from his cheek

A blast, that scours the sky, forthwith our air,

Clear’d of the rack, that hung on it before,

Glitters; and, With his beauties all unveil’d,

The firmament looks forth serene, and smiles;

Such was my cheer, when Beatrice drove

With clear reply the shadows back, and truth

Was manifested, as a star in heaven.

And when the words were ended, not unlike

To iron in the furnace, every cirque

Ebullient shot forth scintillating fires:

And every sparkle shivering to new blaze,

In number did outmillion the account

Reduplicate upon the chequer’d board.

Then heard I echoing on from choir to choir,

“Hosanna,” to the fixed point, that holds,

And shall for ever hold them to their place,

From everlasting, irremovable.
Musing awhile I stood: and she, who saw

by inward meditations, thus began:

“In the first circles, they, whom thou beheldst,

Are seraphim and cherubim. Thus swift

Follow their hoops, in likeness to the point,

Near as they can, approaching; and they can

The more, the loftier their vision. Those,

That round them fleet, gazing the Godhead next,

Are thrones; in whom the first trine ends. And all

Are blessed, even as their sight descends

Deeper into the truth, wherein rest is

For every mind. Thus happiness hath root

In seeing, not in loving, which of sight

Is aftergrowth. And of the seeing such

The meed, as unto each in due degree

Grace and good-will their measure have assign’d.

The other trine, that with still opening buds

In this eternal springtide blossom fair,

Fearless of bruising from the nightly ram,

Breathe up in warbled melodies threefold

Hosannas blending ever, from the three

Transmitted. hierarchy of gods, for aye

Rejoicing, dominations first, next then

Virtues, and powers the third. The next to whom

Are princedoms and archangels, with glad round

To tread their festal ring; and last the band

Angelical, disporting in their sphere.

All, as they circle in their orders, look

Aloft, and downward with such sway prevail,

That all with mutual impulse tend to God.

These once a mortal view beheld. Desire

In Dionysius so intently wrought,

That he, as I have done rang’d them; and nam’d

Their orders, marshal’d in his thought. From him

Dissentient, one refus’d his sacred read.

But soon as in this heav’n his doubting eyes

Were open’d, Gregory at his error smil’d

Nor marvel, that a denizen of earth

Should scan such secret truth; for he had learnt

Both this and much beside of these our orbs,

From an eye-witness to heav’n’s mysteries.”

CANTO XXIX

No longer than what time Latona’s twins

Cover’d of Libra and the fleecy star,

Together both, girding the’ horizon hang,

In even balance from the zenith pois’d,

Till from that verge, each, changing hemisphere,

Part the nice level; e’en so brief a space

Did Beatrice’s silence hold. A smile

Bat painted on her cheek; and her fix’d gaze

Bent on the point, at which my vision fail’d:

When thus her words resuming she began:

“I speak, nor what thou wouldst inquire demand;

For I have mark’d it, where all time and place

Are present. Not for increase to himself

Of good, which may not be increas’d, but forth

To manifest his glory by its beams,

Inhabiting his own eternity,

Beyond time’s limit or what bound soe’er

To circumscribe his being, as he will’d,

Into new natures, like unto himself,

Eternal Love unfolded. Nor before,

As if in dull inaction torpid lay.

For not in process of before or aft

Upon these waters mov’d the Spirit of God.

Simple and mix’d, both form and substance, forth

To perfect being started, like three darts

Shot from a bow three-corded. And as ray

In crystal, glass, and amber, shines entire,

E’en at the moment of its issuing; thus

Did, from th’ eternal Sovran, beam entire

His threefold operation, at one act

Produc’d coeval. Yet in order each

Created his due station knew: those highest,

Who pure intelligence were made: mere power

The lowest: in the midst, bound with strict league,

Intelligence and power, unsever’d bond.

Long tract of ages by the angels past,

Ere the creating of another world,

Describ’d on Jerome’s pages thou hast seen.

But that what I disclose to thee is true,

Those penmen, whom the Holy Spirit mov’d

In many a passage of their sacred book

Attest; as thou by diligent search shalt find

And reason in some sort discerns the same,

Who scarce would grant the heav’nly ministers

Of their perfection void, so long a space.

Thus when and where these spirits of love were made,

Thou know’st, and how: and knowing hast allay’d

Thy thirst, which from the triple question rose.

Ere one had reckon’d twenty, e’en so soon

Part of the angels fell: and in their fall

Confusion to your elements ensued.

The others kept their station: and this task,

Whereon thou lookst, began with such delight,

That they surcease not ever, day nor night,

Their circling. Of that fatal lapse the cause

Was the curst pride of him, whom thou hast seen

Pent with the world’s incumbrance. Those, whom here

Thou seest, were lowly to confess themselves

Of his free bounty, who had made them apt

For ministries so high: therefore their views

Were by enlight’ning grace and their own merit

Exalted; so that in their will confirm’d

They stand, nor feel to fall. For do not doubt,

But to receive the grace, which heav’n vouchsafes,

Is meritorious, even as the soul

With prompt affection welcometh the guest.

Now, without further help, if with good heed

My words thy mind have treasur’d, thou henceforth

This consistory round about mayst scan,

And gaze thy fill. But since thou hast on earth

Heard vain disputers, reasoners in the schools,

Canvas the’ angelic nature, and dispute

Its powers of apprehension, memory, choice;

Therefore, ’t is well thou take from me the truth,

Pure and without disguise, which they below,

Equivocating, darken and perplex.

“Know thou, that, from the first, these substances,

Rejoicing in the countenance of God,

Have held unceasingly their view, intent

Upon the glorious vision, from the which

Naught absent is nor hid: where then no change

Of newness with succession interrupts,

Remembrance there needs none to gather up

Divided thought and images remote

“So that men, thus at variance with the truth

Dream, though their eyes be open; reckless some

Of error; others well aware they err,

To whom more guilt and shame are justly due.

Each the known track of sage philosophy

Deserts, and has a byway of his own:

So much the restless eagerness to shine

And love of singularity prevail.

Yet this, offensive as it is, provokes

Heav’n’s anger less, than when the book of God

Is forc’d to yield to man’s authority,

Or from its straightness warp’d: no reck’ning made

What blood the sowing of it in the world

Has cost; what favour for himself he wins,

Who meekly clings to it. The aim of all

Is how to shine: e’en they, whose office is

To preach the Gospel, let the gospel sleep,

And pass their own inventions off instead.

One tells, how at Christ’s suffering the wan moon

Bent back her steps, and shadow’d o’er the sun

With intervenient disk, as she withdrew:

Another, how the light shrouded itself

Within its tabernacle, and left dark

The Spaniard and the Indian, with the Jew.

Such fables Florence in her pulpit hears,

Bandied about more frequent, than the names

Of Bindi and of Lapi in her streets.

The sheep, meanwhile, poor witless ones, return

From pasture, fed with wind: and what avails

For their excuse, they do not see their harm?

Christ said not to his first conventicle,

‘Go forth and preach impostures to the world,’

But gave them truth to build on; and the sound

Was mighty on their lips; nor needed they,

Beside the gospel, other spear or shield,

To aid them in their warfare for the faith.

The preacher now provides himself with store

Of jests and gibes; and, so there be no lack

Of laughter, while he vents them, his big cowl

Distends, and he has won the meed he sought:

Could but the vulgar catch a glimpse the while

Of that dark bird which nestles in his hood,

They scarce would wait to hear the blessing said.

Which now the dotards hold in such esteem,

That every counterfeit, who spreads abroad

The hands of holy promise, finds a throng

Of credulous fools beneath. Saint Anthony

Fattens with this his swine, and others worse

Than swine, who diet at his lazy board,

Paying with unstamp’d metal for their fare.

“But (for we far have wander’d) let us seek

The forward path again; so as the way

Be shorten’d with the time. No mortal tongue

Nor thought of man hath ever reach’d so far,

That of these natures he might count the tribes.

What Daniel of their thousands hath reveal’d

With finite number infinite conceals.

The fountain at whose source these drink their beams,

With light supplies them in as many modes,

As there are splendours, that it shines on: each

According to the virtue it conceives,

Differing in love and sweet affection.

Look then how lofty and how huge in breadth

The’ eternal might, which, broken and dispers’d

Over such countless mirrors, yet remains

Whole in itself and one, as at the first.”

CANTO XXX

Noon’s fervid hour perchance six thousand miles

From hence is distant; and the shadowy cone

Almost to level on our earth declines;

When from the midmost of this blue abyss

By turns some star is to our vision lost.

And straightway as the handmaid of the sun

Puts forth her radiant brow, all, light by light,

Fade, and the spangled firmament shuts in,

E’en to the loveliest of the glittering throng.

Thus vanish’d gradually from my sight

The triumph, which plays ever round the point,

That overcame me, seeming (for it did)

Engirt by that it girdeth. Wherefore love,

With loss of other object, forc’d me bend

Mine eyes on Beatrice once again.

If all, that hitherto is told of her,

Were in one praise concluded, ’t were too weak

To furnish out this turn. Mine eyes did look

On beauty, such, as I believe in sooth,

Not merely to exceed our human, but,

That save its Maker, none can to the full

Enjoy it. At this point o’erpower’d I fail,

Unequal to my theme, as never bard

Of buskin or of sock hath fail’d before.

For, as the sun doth to the feeblest sight,

E’en so remembrance of that witching smile

Hath dispossess my spirit of itself.

Not from that day, when on this earth I first

Beheld her charms, up to that view of them,

Have I with song applausive ever ceas’d

To follow, but not follow them no more;

My course here bounded, as each artist’s is,

When it doth touch the limit of his skill.

She (such as I bequeath her to the bruit

Of louder trump than mine, which hasteneth on,

Urging its arduous matter to the close),

Her words resum’d, in gesture and in voice

Resembling one accustom’d to command:

“Forth from the last corporeal are we come

Into the heav’n, that is unbodied light,

Light intellectual replete with love,

Love of true happiness replete with joy,

Joy, that transcends all sweetness of delight.

Here shalt thou look on either mighty host

Of Paradise; and one in that array,

Which in the final judgment thou shalt see.”

As when the lightning, in a sudden spleen

Unfolded, dashes from the blinding eyes

The visive spirits dazzled and bedimm’d;

So, round about me, fulminating streams

Of living radiance play’d, and left me swath’d

And veil’d in dense impenetrable blaze.

Such weal is in the love, that stills this heav’n;

For its own flame the torch this fitting ever!

No sooner to my list’ning ear had come

The brief assurance, than I understood

New virtue into me infus’d, and sight

Kindled afresh, with vigour to sustain

Excess of light, however pure. I look’d;

And in the likeness of a river saw

Light flowing, from whose amber-seeming waves

Flash’d up effulgence, as they glided on

’Twixt banks, on either side, painted with spring,

Incredible how fair; and, from the tide,

There ever and anon, outstarting, flew

Sparkles instinct with life; and in the flow’rs

Did set them, like to rubies chas’d in gold;

Then, as if drunk with odors, plung’d again

Into the wondrous flood; from which, as one

Re’enter’d, still another rose. “The thirst

Of knowledge high, whereby thou art inflam’d,

To search the meaning of what here thou seest,

The more it warms thee, pleases me the more.

But first behooves thee of this water drink,

Or ere that longing be allay’d.” So spake

The day-star of mine eyes; then thus subjoin’d:

“This stream, and these, forth issuing from its gulf,

And diving back, a living topaz each,

With all this laughter on its bloomy shores,

Are but a preface, shadowy of the truth

They emblem: not that, in themselves, the things

Are crude; but on thy part is the defect,

For that thy views not yet aspire so high.”

Never did babe, that had outslept his wont,

Rush, with such eager straining, to the milk,

As I toward the water, bending me,

To make the better mirrors of mine eyes

In the refining wave; and, as the eaves

Of mine eyelids did drink of it, forthwith

Seem’d it unto me turn’d from length to round,

Then as a troop of maskers, when they put

Their vizors off, look other than before,

The counterfeited semblance thrown aside;

So into greater jubilee were chang’d

Those flowers and sparkles, and distinct I saw

Before me either court of heav’n displac’d.

O prime enlightener! thou who crav’st me strength

On the high triumph of thy realm to gaze!

Grant virtue now to utter what I kenn’d,

There is in heav’n a light, whose goodly shine

Makes the Creator visible to all

Created, that in seeing him alone

Have peace; and in a circle spreads so far,

That the circumference were too loose a zone

To girdle in the sun. All is one beam,

Reflected from the summit of the first,

That moves, which being hence and vigour takes,

And as some cliff, that from the bottom eyes

Its image mirror’d in the crystal flood,

As if t’ admire its brave appareling

Of verdure and of flowers: so, round about,

Eyeing the light, on more than million thrones,

Stood, eminent, whatever from our earth

Has to the skies return’d. How wide the leaves

Extended to their utmost of this rose,

Whose lowest step embosoms such a space

Of ample radiance! Yet, nor amplitude

Nor height impeded, but my view with ease

Took in the full dimensions of that joy.

Near or remote, what there avails, where God

Immediate rules, and Nature, awed, suspends

Her sway? Into the yellow of the rose

Perennial, which in bright expansiveness,

Lays forth its gradual blooming, redolent

Of praises to the never-wint’ring sun,

As one, who fain would speak yet holds his peace,

Beatrice led me; and, “Behold,” she said,

“This fair assemblage! stoles of snowy white

How numberless! The city, where we dwell,

Behold how vast! and these our seats so throng’d

Few now are wanting here! In that proud stall,

On which, the crown, already o’er its state

Suspended, holds thine eyes—or ere thyself

Mayst at the wedding sup,—shall rest the soul

Of the great Harry, he who, by the world

Augustas hail’d, to Italy must come,

Before her day be ripe. But ye are sick,

And in your tetchy wantonness as blind,

As is the bantling, that of hunger dies,

And drives away the nurse. Nor may it be,

That he, who in the sacred forum sways,

Openly or in secret, shall with him

Accordant walk: Whom God will not endure

I’ th’ holy office long; but thrust him down

To Simon Magus, where Magna’s priest

Will sink beneath him: such will be his meed.”

CANTO XXXI

In fashion, as a snow-white rose, lay then

Before my view the saintly multitude,

Which in his own blood Christ espous’d. Meanwhile

That other host, that soar aloft to gaze

And celebrate his glory, whom they love,

Hover’d around; and, like a troop of bees,

Amid the vernal sweets alighting now,

Now, clustering, where their fragrant labour glows,

Flew downward to the mighty flow’r, or rose

From the redundant petals, streaming back

Unto the steadfast dwelling of their joy.

Faces had they of flame, and wings of gold;

The rest was whiter than the driven snow.

And as they flitted down into the flower,

From range to range, fanning their plumy loins,

Whisper’d the peace and ardour, which they won

From that soft winnowing. Shadow none, the vast

Interposition of such numerous flight

Cast, from above, upon the flower, or view

Obstructed aught. For, through the universe,

Wherever merited, celestial light

Glides freely, and no obstacle prevents.

All there, who reign in safety and in bliss,

Ages long past or new, on one sole mark

Their love and vision fix’d. O trinal beam

Of individual star, that charmst them thus,

Vouchsafe one glance to gild our storm below!

If the grim brood, from Arctic shores that roam’d,

(Where helice, forever, as she wheels,

Sparkles a mother’s fondness on her son)

Stood in mute wonder ’mid the works of Rome,

When to their view the Lateran arose

In greatness more than earthly; I, who then

From human to divine had past, from time

Unto eternity, and out of Florence

To justice and to truth, how might I choose

But marvel too? ’Twixt gladness and amaze,

In sooth no will had I to utter aught,

Or hear. And, as a pilgrim, when he rests

Within the temple of his vow, looks round

In breathless awe, and hopes some time to tell

Of all its goodly state: e’en so mine eyes

Cours’d up and down along the living light,

Now low, and now aloft, and now around,

Visiting every step. Looks I beheld,

Where charity in soft persuasion sat,

Smiles from within and radiance from above,

And in each gesture grace and honour high.

So rov’d my ken, and its general form

All Paradise survey’d: when round I turn’d

With purpose of my lady to inquire

Once more of things, that held my thought suspense,

But answer found from other than I ween’d;

For, Beatrice, when I thought to see,

I saw instead a senior, at my side,

Rob’d, as the rest, in glory. Joy benign

Glow’d in his eye, and o’er his cheek diffus’d,

With gestures such as spake a father’s love.

And, “Whither is she vanish’d?” straight I ask’d.

“By Beatrice summon’d,” he replied,

“I come to aid thy wish. Looking aloft

To the third circle from the highest, there

Behold her on the throne, wherein her merit

Hath plac’d her.” Answering not, mine eyes I rais’d,

And saw her, where aloof she sat, her brow

A wreath reflecting of eternal beams.

Not from the centre of the sea so far

Unto the region of the highest thunder,

As was my ken from hers; and yet the form

Came through that medium down, unmix’d and pure,
“O Lady! thou in whom my hopes have rest!

Who, for my safety, hast not scorn’d, in hell

To leave the traces of thy footsteps mark’d!

For all mine eyes have seen, I, to thy power

And goodness, virtue owe and grace. Of slave,

Thou hast to freedom brought me; and no means,

For my deliverance apt, hast left untried.

Thy liberal bounty still toward me keep.

That, when my spirit, which thou madest whole,

Is loosen’d from this body, it may find

Favour with thee.” So I my suit preferr’d:

And she, so distant, as appear’d, look’d down,

And smil’d; then tow’rds th’ eternal fountain turn’d.

And thus the senior, holy and rever’d:

“That thou at length mayst happily conclude

Thy voyage (to which end I was dispatch’d,

By supplication mov’d and holy love)

Let thy upsoaring vision range, at large,

This garden through: for so, by ray divine

Kindled, thy ken a higher flight shall mount;

And from heav’n’s queen, whom fervent I adore,

All gracious aid befriend us; for that I

Am her own faithful Bernard.” Like a wight,

Who haply from Croatia wends to see

Our Veronica, and the while ’t is shown,

Hangs over it with never-sated gaze,

And, all that he hath heard revolving, saith

Unto himself in thought: “And didst thou look

E’en thus, O Jesus, my true Lord and God?

And was this semblance thine?” So gaz’d I then

Adoring; for the charity of him,

Who musing, in the world that peace enjoy’d,

Stood lively before me. “Child of grace!”

Thus he began: “thou shalt not knowledge gain

Of this glad being, if thine eyes are held

Still in this depth below. But search around

The circles, to the furthest, till thou spy

Seated in state, the queen, that of this realm

Is sovran.” Straight mine eyes I rais’d; and bright,

As, at the birth of morn, the eastern clime

Above th’ horizon, where the sun declines;

To mine eyes, that upward, as from vale

To mountain sped, at th’ extreme bound, a part

Excell’d in lustre all the front oppos’d.

And as the glow burns ruddiest o’er the wave,

That waits the sloping beam, which Phaeton

Ill knew to guide, and on each part the light

Diminish’d fades, intensest in the midst;

So burn’d the peaceful oriflame, and slack’d

On every side the living flame decay’d.

And in that midst their sportive pennons wav’d

Thousands of angels; in resplendence each

Distinct, and quaint adornment. At their glee

And carol, smil’d the Lovely One of heav’n,

That joy was in the eyes of all the blest.

Had I a tongue in eloquence as rich,

As is the colouring in fancy’s loom,

’T were all too poor to utter the least part

Of that enchantment. When he saw mine eyes

Intent on her, that charm’d him, Bernard gaz’d

With so exceeding fondness, as infus’d

Ardour into my breast, unfelt before.

CANTO XXXII

Freely the sage, though wrapt in musings high,

Assum’d the teacher’s part, and mild began:

“The wound, that Mary clos’d, she open’d first,

Who sits so beautiful at Mary’s feet.

The third in order, underneath her, lo!

Rachel with Beatrice. Sarah next,

Judith, Rebecca, and the gleaner maid,

Meek ancestress of him, who sang the songs

Of sore repentance in his sorrowful mood.

All, as I name them, down from deaf to leaf,

Are in gradation throned on the rose.

And from the seventh step, successively,

Adown the breathing tresses of the flow’r

Still doth the file of Hebrew dames proceed.

For these are a partition wall, whereby

The sacred stairs are sever’d, as the faith

In Christ divides them. On this part, where blooms

Each leaf in full maturity, are set

Such as in Christ, or ere he came, believ’d.

On th’ other, where an intersected space

Yet shows the semicircle void, abide

All they, who look’d to Christ already come.

And as our Lady on her glorious stool,

And they who on their stools beneath her sit,

This way distinction make: e’en so on his,

The mighty Baptist that way marks the line

(He who endur’d the desert and the pains

Of martyrdom, and for two years of hell,

Yet still continued holy), and beneath,

Augustin, Francis, Benedict, and the rest,

Thus far from round to round. So heav’n’s decree

Forecasts, this garden equally to fill.

With faith in either view, past or to come,

Learn too, that downward from the step, which cleaves

Midway the twain compartments, none there are

Who place obtain for merit of their own,

But have through others’ merit been advanc’d,

On set conditions: spirits all releas’d,

Ere for themselves they had the power to choose.

And, if thou mark and listen to them well,

Their childish looks and voice declare as much.

“Here, silent as thou art, I know thy doubt;

And gladly will I loose the knot, wherein

Thy subtle thoughts have bound thee. From this realm

Excluded, chalice no entrance here may find,

No more shall hunger, thirst, or sorrow can.

A law immutable hath establish’d all;

Nor is there aught thou seest, that doth not fit,

Exactly, as the finger to the ring.

It is not therefore without cause, that these,

O’erspeedy comers to immortal life,

Are different in their shares of excellence.

Our Sovran Lord—that settleth this estate

In love and in delight so absolute,

That wish can dare no further—every soul,

Created in his joyous sight to dwell,

With grace at pleasure variously endows.

And for a proof th’ effect may well suffice.

And ’t is moreover most expressly mark’d

In holy scripture, where the twins are said

To, have struggled in the womb. Therefore, as grace

Inweaves the coronet, so every brow

Weareth its proper hue of orient light.

And merely in respect to his prime gift,

Not in reward of meritorious deed,

Hath each his several degree assign’d.

In early times with their own innocence

More was not wanting, than the parents’ faith,

To save them: those first ages past, behoov’d

That circumcision in the males should imp

The flight of innocent wings: but since the day

Of grace hath come, without baptismal rites

In Christ accomplish’d, innocence herself

Must linger yet below. Now raise thy view

Unto the visage most resembling Christ:

For, in her splendour only, shalt thou win

The pow’r to look on him.” Forthwith I saw

Such floods of gladness on her visage shower’d,

From holy spirits, winging that profound;

That, whatsoever I had yet beheld,

Had not so much suspended me with wonder,

Or shown me such similitude of God.

And he, who had to her descended, once,

On earth, now hail’d in heav’n; and on pois’d wing.

“Ave, Maria, Gratia Plena,” sang:

To whose sweet anthem all the blissful court,

From all parts answ’ring, rang: that holier joy

Brooded the deep serene. “Father rever’d:

Who deign’st, for me, to quit the pleasant place,

Wherein thou sittest, by eternal lot!

Say, who that angel is, that with such glee

Beholds our queen, and so enamour’d glows

Of her high beauty, that all fire he seems.”

So I again resorted to the lore

Of my wise teacher, he, whom Mary’s charms

Embellish’d, as the sun the morning star;

Who thus in answer spake: “In him are summ’d,

Whatever of buxomness and free delight

May be in Spirit, or in angel, met:

And so beseems: for that he bare the palm

Down unto Mary, when the Son of God

Vouchsaf’d to clothe him in terrestrial weeds.

Now let thine eyes wait heedful on my words,

And note thou of this just and pious realm

The chiefest nobles. Those, highest in bliss,

The twain, on each hand next our empress thron’d,

Are as it were two roots unto this rose.

He to the left, the parent, whose rash taste

Proves bitter to his seed; and, on the right,

That ancient father of the holy church,

Into whose keeping Christ did give the keys

Of this sweet flow’r: near whom behold the seer,

That, ere he died, saw all the grievous times

Of the fair bride, who with the lance and nails

Was won. And, near unto the other, rests

The leader, under whom on manna fed

Th’ ungrateful nation, fickle and perverse.

On th’ other part, facing to Peter, lo!

Where Anna sits, so well content to look

On her lov’d daughter, that with moveless eye

She chants the loud hosanna: while, oppos’d

To the first father of your mortal kind,

Is Lucia, at whose hest thy lady sped,

When on the edge of ruin clos’d thine eye.

“But (for the vision hasteneth so an end)

Here break we off, as the good workman doth,

That shapes the cloak according to the cloth:

And to the primal love our ken shall rise;

That thou mayst penetrate the brightness, far

As sight can bear thee. Yet, alas! in sooth

Beating thy pennons, thinking to advance,

Thou backward fall’st. Grace then must first be gain’d;

Her grace, whose might can help thee. Thou in prayer

Seek her: and, with affection, whilst I sue,

Attend, and yield me all thy heart.” He said,

And thus the saintly orison began.

CANTO XXXIII

“O virgin mother, daughter of thy Son,

Created beings all in lowliness

Surpassing, as in height, above them all,

Term by th’ eternal counsel pre-ordain’d,

Ennobler of thy nature, so advanc’d

In thee, that its great Maker did not scorn,

Himself, in his own work enclos’d to dwell!

For in thy womb rekindling shone the love

Reveal’d, whose genial influence makes now

This flower to germin in eternal peace!

Here thou to us, of charity and love,

Art, as the noon-day torch: and art, beneath,

To mortal men, of hope a living spring.

So mighty art thou, lady! and so great,

That he who grace desireth, and comes not

To thee for aidance, fain would have desire

Fly without wings. Nor only him who asks,

Thy bounty succours, but doth freely oft

Forerun the asking. Whatsoe’er may be

Of excellence in creature, pity mild,

Relenting mercy, large munificence,

Are all combin’d in thee. Here kneeleth one,

Who of all spirits hath review’d the state,

From the world’s lowest gap unto this height.

Suppliant to thee he kneels, imploring grace

For virtue, yet more high to lift his ken

Toward the bliss supreme. And I, who ne’er

Coveted sight, more fondly, for myself,

Than now for him, my prayers to thee prefer,

(And pray they be not scant) that thou wouldst drive

Each cloud of his mortality away;

That on the sovran pleasure he may gaze.

This also I entreat of thee, O queen!

Who canst do what thou wilt! that in him thou

Wouldst after all he hath beheld, preserve

Affection sound, and human passions quell.

Lo! Where, with Beatrice, many a saint

Stretch their clasp’d hands, in furtherance of my suit!”

The eyes, that heav’n with love and awe regards,

Fix’d on the suitor, witness’d, how benign

She looks on pious pray’rs: then fasten’d they

On th’ everlasting light, wherein no eye

Of creature, as may well be thought, so far

Can travel inward. I, meanwhile, who drew

Near to the limit, where all wishes end,

The ardour of my wish (for so behooved),

Ended within me. Beck’ning smil’d the sage,

That I should look aloft: but, ere he bade,

Already of myself aloft I look’d;

For visual strength, refining more and more,

Bare me into the ray authentical

Of sovran light. Thenceforward, what I saw,

Was not for words to speak, nor memory’s self

To stand against such outrage on her skill.

As one, who from a dream awaken’d, straight,

All he hath seen forgets; yet still retains

Impression of the feeling in his dream;

E’en such am I: for all the vision dies,

As ’t were, away; and yet the sense of sweet,

That sprang from it, still trickles in my heart.

Thus in the sun-thaw is the snow unseal’d;

Thus in the winds on flitting leaves was lost

The Sybil’s sentence. O eternal beam!

(Whose height what reach of mortal thought may soar?)

Yield me again some little particle

Of what thou then appearedst, give my tongue

Power, but to leave one sparkle of thy glory,

Unto the race to come, that shall not lose

Thy triumph wholly, if thou waken aught

Of memory in me, and endure to hear

The record sound in this unequal strain.

Such keenness from the living ray I met,

That, if mine eyes had turn’d away, methinks,

I had been lost; but, so embolden’d, on

I pass’d, as I remember, till my view

Hover’d the brink of dread infinitude.

O grace! unenvying of thy boon! that gav’st

Boldness to fix so earnestly my ken

On th’ everlasting splendour, that I look’d,

While sight was unconsum’d, and, in that depth,

Saw in one volume clasp’d of love, whatever

The universe unfolds; all properties

Of substance and of accident, beheld,

Compounded, yet one individual light

The whole. And of such bond methinks I saw

The universal form: for that whenever

I do but speak of it, my soul dilates

Beyond her proper self; and, till I speak,

One moment seems a longer lethargy,

Than five-and-twenty ages had appear’d

To that emprize, that first made Neptune wonder

At Argo’s shadow darkening on his flood.

With fixed heed, suspense and motionless,

Wond’ring I gaz’d; and admiration still

Was kindled, as I gaz’d. It may not be,

That one, who looks upon that light, can turn

To other object, willingly, his view.

For all the good, that will may covet, there

Is summ’d; and all, elsewhere defective found,

Complete. My tongue shall utter now, no more

E’en what remembrance keeps, than could the babe’s

That yet is moisten’d at his mother’s breast.

Not that the semblance of the living light

Was chang’d (that ever as at first remain’d)

But that my vision quickening, in that sole

Appearance, still new miracles descry’d,

And toil’d me with the change. In that abyss

Of radiance, clear and lofty, seem’d methought,

Three orbs of triple hue clipt in one bound:

And, from another, one reflected seem’d,

As rainbow is from rainbow: and the third

Seem’d fire, breath’d equally from both. Oh speech

How feeble and how faint art thou, to give

Conception birth! Yet this to what I saw

Is less than little. Oh eternal light!

Sole in thyself that dwellst; and of thyself

Sole understood, past, present, or to come!

Thou smiledst; on that circling, which in thee

Seem’d as reflected splendour, while I mus’d;

For I therein, methought, in its own hue

Beheld our image painted: steadfastly

I therefore por’d upon the view. As one

Who vers’d in geometric lore, would fain

Measure the circle; and, though pondering long

And deeply, that beginning, which he needs,

Finds not; e’en such was I, intent to scan

The novel wonder, and trace out the form,

How to the circle fitted, and therein

How plac’d: but the flight was not for my wing;

Had not a flash darted athwart my mind,

And in the spleen unfolded what it sought.

Here vigour fail’d the tow’ring fantasy:

But yet the will roll’d onward, like a wheel

In even motion, by the Love impell’d,

That moves the sun in heav’n and all the stars.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DIVINE COMEDY ***

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