

Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri

Translated by S. Fowler Wright

Fowler Wright Ltd
1928

The Inferno
From the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri

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PREFACE

I suppose that a very great majority of English-speaking people, if they were asked to name the greatest epic poet of the Christian era in Western Europe, would answer Dante, and that this answer would be given as decisively by those who would speak with an expert knowledge of European literature as by the larger number who would be repeating a received opinion.

Yet those who can read him in the medieval Italian must be a very small and still decreasing minority, and when all that is possible has been said in support of any existing translation, it remains a fact that there is no English rendering of the Divine Comedy, even including the tepid competence of Cary, which has won a genuine popularity.

For this, there are three reasons.

First, there is the general and almost insuperable difficulty of translating poetry of any kind from or into any language whatever.

Next, there is a special obstacle arising from the form in which the Divine Comedy was composed, which cannot be successfully imitated in English.

Third, there is the fact that a student of Dante is confronted by such a massed accretion of commentary that his approach to the poem is almost forced toward the pedantic rather than the poetic. He is inclined to regard the obscure or halting line, the obvious padding, the enforced rhyme, which must occur at times in the greatest epic, as too sacred to be altered, and too important to be ignored. Here I am tempted to say that my first qualification for this undertaking is that, while I have some knowledge of European poetry, and some practice in its composition, I make no claim whatever to Italian scholarship!

The first of these - the inherent difficulty of all translation of poetry - may be briefly stated in this way. A great poem must have beauty both of form and of content. Soul and body must both be admirable. Having his subject under control, the poet represents it in such a way as is most suitable to the rhythms and verbal beauties of which his language is capable. If a bilingual poet were to attempt composition of the same epic in two languages, without the feeling of obligation to himself which a translator must feel, I have no doubt that he would deviate very widely in details of expression, and often in the actual thoughts expressed, as he would be led by different felicities of expression or the suggestion or absence of a rhyming word.

A translator, feeling an inferior liberty, faces alternate pitfalls. He may hammer out a verbal repetition of the original, phrase by phrase, which cannot result otherwise than in a doggerel imitation of poetry. He will labour diligently, and, in the end, he will not merely have failed to translate a poem: he will have produced a malignant libel. Alternately, he may be tempted to follow the lure of his own constructions, or to omit or insert as the exigencies of the verse may lead him.

How can the narrow path be held successfully between these pitfalls - or, if one must be taken, on which side should the descent be made?

In confronting these perils, there is a first and vital question to be decided. In what metrical form shall the translation be made? Naturally, the first thought, and the first preference, is for that of the original poem. The rhythm and structure of a poem are not accidental. They are parts of its individuality. But the two languages concerned may differ too widely in their accentuations, in their dominant rhythms in their grammatical and syllabic constructions, for such a repetition to be possible.

In face of this (which is a usual) difficulty, the translator may wisely consider what form the poet would most probably have chosen had he composed the poem in the language into which it is intended to render it.

Asking myself this question, I conclude that Dante would certainly not have selected for an English poem the *terza rima* in which the Divine Comedy is written, and that he would, with equal certainty, have selected the decasyllabic line, which is the finest and most flexible of which our language is capable.

Coming to the question of rhyme, a greater doubt arises. The decasyllabic line can be used with equal success for blank and for rhymed verse. Dante used rhyme, which is a reason for adopting it, if possible. But the use of rhyme certainly increases the difficulty of a translation which is to be (if possible) both accurate and well constructed. My decision (which must be justified, if at all, by result) was to introduce rhyme with an irregular freedom, but to endeavour to reach a quality of verse which would be so far independent of this subordinate feature that its irregularity, or even occasional absence, would be unobtrusive to the reader's mind.

Having selected a form in which I hoped to be able to move with sufficient freedom, and which, in English, is best adapted to the spirit

of the poem, I had to face the larger questions of formal and spiritual fidelity. In regard to these I recognize two primary obligations: first, I regard it as inexcusable to introduce any word or phrase which discolours the meaning of the original, or deviates from it; second, I am bound to present the substance of the poem with such verbal beauty as I am capable of constructing, even though an adjective be omitted or added in the process, or some non-essential order of narration be changed to obtain it. This last freedom of rendering is not merely a translator's right, it is a clear duty, because the directness and vigour of the original cannot be reproduced by any verbal literality, and it is of the first importance that he should inspire the poem with a new vitality.

My own approach to the poem having been poetic rather than pedantic, I have concerned myself very little with the subtleties of disputed words *unless* some fundamental question of spiritual interpretation be dependent thereto. Desiring to introduce it to English readers from the same standpoint, I have reduced the inevitable notes to the barest minimum, and have placed them at the end of the volume.

Some knowledge of the conditions of Europe, social, political, and intellectual, as Dante knew them, some knowledge of the corruptions of Church and State, and of the civil discords which distracted his native Florence, and which prevailed in most of the cities of Northern Italy, may be essential to an understanding of the poem; a more detailed knowledge will add greatly to the enjoyment of many passages in it; but, finally, the Divine Comedy must stand or fall by its internal vitality, and it may gain more than it loses by being presented independently of the almost unbelievable accretions of disputation and commentary which have been piled upon it.

The cosmographical idea on which the poem is founded is extremely simple. The earth is a fixed point in the centre of the Universe. The northern hemisphere is inhabited by the race of Adam. Purgatory is an isolated mountain in the seas of the southern hemisphere, which was unexplored at the time at which the poem was written. The seven Heavens extend, one beyond another, above the earth on every side, the seventh being infinite in extent. Hell is a central core of evil in the earth's interior.

Metaphorically, Dante represents himself as being entangled in the corruption of Florentine politics, and restrained from their temptations by his love of literature (Virgil) and by his memory of

Beatrice, by which influences he is led through and out of this central Hell to the ultimate Heaven.

It would be absurd to suppose that Dante believed in this Hell of his imagination as a physical fact. It would have been contrary to the logic of his intellect to suppose that he could discover its locality, or that of a material Purgatory, by his own intuition; nor, had he intended his readers to regard it otherwise than allegorically, would he have peopled it with fabled monsters such as Minos, Cerberus, and the Minotaur; or with demons of Persian, and centaurs of Greek, mythology.

He drew widely and impartially, from every source of human imagination. He faced the mystery of evil without flinching. He saw that good and evil are inevitable and everlasting, as long as life be free-willed and finite: and, recognizing this, he asserted confidently the divine supremacy of love, and its continual conquest, so that the whole conception becomes one magnificent metaphor of the preponderance of good and its eternal triumph, the residuum of evil being continually chased down and pressed into its central core, while the surrounding Heavens extend upwards, each of a larger orbit, and of a greater holiness than the one below, till the ultimate bliss of the seventh Heaven extends into infinity, so that even the vast extent of the six Heavens below is a triviality in this comparison

Even in the narrow confines of the ever-conquered evil, we are to understand that Love is absolute in its supremacy. It enters Hell, and Hell ceases to exist around it.

So we find that Hell has no power over those of pre-Christian times whose own lives were blameless. These are in a place of green lawns and quiet waters:

for there,
Intolerant of itself was Hell made fair
To accord with its containing.

And even the verdict of Hell has no finality, for Virgil tells how he had witnessed the time when -

"Through the shrunk hells there came a Great One, crowned
And garmented with conquest,"

and how Christ had rescued a host of lost souls -

"unnumbered, whom he had led
Triumphant from the dark abodes, to be
Among the blest forever."

And we are shown that Hell has no power to disturb the serenity of Beatrice. For such as she, she explains to Virgil -

"There is no fear nor any hurt in Hell."

Yet there is one respect in which Dante's attitude is too Christ-like to be in sympathy with the vague compromises of modern Christianity. He teaches that sin is sin, and that its consequences are logical, and inevitable. Those who have distorted the Founder of Christianity till "mild" appears to be an appropriate descriptive adjective, will have little sympathy with the attitude of Dante, whose tears for Francesca do not condone her guilt. She is in one of the outer circles of Hell, and she has the companionship of the one she loved, but she is in Hell, no less, without even the hope of Purgatory. Her husband, who killed her, is thrown into the lowest depth of damnation. There are no tears for him. Yet his condemnation is not her acquittal. She made a contract of marriage, and she broke it in an act of adultery with her husband's brother. Contracts should be kept. There is no more to be said, though there may be tears of pity.

So, when he sees the degradation of some of the finest intellects of the human race, he tells us how he was moved by their grief until -

I, whose eyes with equal tears were wet,
Bowed down upon the cold stone parapet
And wept beyond controlling.

But his pity is powerless to move them from the Hell which their deeds have earned.

There is the same impartiality, the same remorseless justice, in the way in which friends or foes, whether with pity or contempt, are consigned to their appropriate places. He has no preference for those of his own city: none for his own Florentine faction. His dearest friend - his bitterest enemy - his closest relative - are equally likely to be found either in the lowest Hell or in the highest Heaven.

Concerning one only, his wife, Gemma Donati, whose alliance drew him into the slough of Florentine politics, is he always and

entirely silent.

More than once his laments over the spiritual ruin of the city he loved reach an emotional intensity which is unrivaled on such a theme in any literature, with the exception of Christ's lament over Jerusalem, yet his love for Florence does not silence the bitter comment:

Five thieves, and every thief a Florentine!

For the Divine Comedy is the great epic of Christianity. Milton attempted the same path, and brought an almost equal poetic genius, and an almost equal ability to enforce the contributions of alien mythologies to support his purpose. But he lacked the passionate hatred of evil, the passionate sympathy with human weakness, the almost God-like impartiality, the serene and confident faith of the earlier poet. It is of the deepest significance that where Dante prosecutes, Milton's brief is endorsed for the defense. He is concerned "to justify the ways of God to man." Dante's God is unapproachable in the ultimate Heaven, and humanity is on trial, but the God of Milton is in the dock; and though he defends his client with stubborn loyalty, and great forensic skill, and claims that he has secured an acquittal, he leaves us with a sense of bewilderment, and a feeling that the result is due rather to clever advocacy than to the solid merits of the case itself. It would have been possible to put the same facts so very differently!

Dante's attitude to the organization and doctrines of the Christian church of his own day is of extreme interest, and presents questions of some complexity.

He saw clearly that the greed of the Church for temporal power was a cause of spiritual weakness, and he was uncompromising in condemnation. He did not hesitate to assert that it was beyond the power of the papacy to excommunicate any man from the Divine forgiveness, giving on this point a direct challenge to the Church's teaching (Purgatorio, Canto V) at that time, as he did when he consigned the Franciscan to Hell for a sin for which he had received absolution in advance (Inferno, Canto XXVII). The very passion of his love for the Church is the measure of his bitterness against a pope who could use his office to betray it. Yet how did he distinguish these freedoms of opinion from the heresies which he condemned? I think a careful consideration of the character and teachings of those whom he variously placed in Hell or Purgatory will solve this apparent inconsistency, and show that there was no confusion in his own mind.

He saw the sin of heresy as something which aims to divide rather than to unite, to destroy rather than to build. If he saw the body of the church of Christ to be diseased, he would not call it healthy, but he strove for its cure, not for its destruction. He directed the whole passion of his soul, the whole force of his intellect, to arousing the Church to consciousness of the corruptions which it contained and tolerated; and, had he succeeded, had he been able to inspire it with his own spirit, it is not too much to say that there would have been no Reformation, or, at the least, that the Reformation would have taken a very different form.

The present volume contains the first of the three parts of which the Divine Comedy consists. Should its reception justify further publication, I hope to follow it with the Purgatorio and the Paradiso at short intervals, as they are already at an advanced stage of preparation.

It has been said that the latter parts of the poem are of less general interest than the first, the Purgatorio being encumbered with a dead philosophy, and the Paradiso rendered monotonous by the fact that Dante had nothing but light and colour with which to build the Heavens of his imagination.

I venture to challenge these opinions. To me, the power and the imagination of the poem rise as it proceeds. I hope to justify this assertion, when I follow this volume with the later sections; and, should I fail, I should still hold that the fault is mine, and not that of the greater poet.

Certainly, he would not himself have given the place of honour to the Inferno, and if we consider it separately, we should not forget that the path through Hell is only a means of approach to a clearer atmosphere where his art -

Reviving from that depth where beauty dies (Purgatorio, Canto I)

can occupy itself with better things, till it culminates in the vision of the ultimate triumph of the Divine Love: (Paradiso, Canto XXIII)

For all the earth
That yearned for Heaven, and all the Heaven that bent
Toward it, separate by the gulf of sin,
Love bridges at last, and ye behold herein
The bridal joys of their so long desire.

Ye see the path God's suffering paved with fire;
And Christ comes down it.

The Inferno

CANTO I

ONE night, when half my life behind me lay,
I wandered from the straight lost path afar.
Through the great dark was no releasing way;
Above that dark was no relieving star.
If yet that terror'd night I think or say,
As death's cold hands its fears resuming are.

Gladly the dreads I felt, too dire to tell,
The hopeless, pathless, lightless hours forgot,
I turn my tale to that which next befell,
When the dawn opened, and the night was not.
The hollowed blackness of that waste, God wot,
Shrank, thinned, and ceased. A blinding splendour hot
Flushed the great height toward which my footsteps fell,
And though it kindled from the nether hell,
Or from the Star that all men leads, alike
It showed me where the great dawn-glories strike
The wide east, and the utmost peaks of snow.

How first I entered on that path astray,
Beset with sleep, I know not. This I know.
When gained my feet the upward, lighted way,
I backward gazed, as one the drowning sea,
The deep strong tides, has baffled, and panting lies,
On the shelved shore, and turns his eyes to see
The league-wide wastes that held him. So mine eyes
Surveyed that fear, the while my wearied frame
Rested, and ever my heart's tossed lake became
More quiet.
Then from that pass released, which yet
With living feet had no man left, I set

My forward steps aslant the steep, that so,
My right foot still the lower, I climbed.

Below

No more I gazed. Around, a slope of sand
Was sterile of all growth on either hand,
Or moving life, a spotted pard except,
That yawning rose, and stretched, and purred and leapt
So closely round my feet, that scarce I kept
The course I would.

That sleek and lovely thing,
The broadening light, the breath of morn and spring,
The sun, that with his stars in Aries lay,
As when Divine Love on Creation's day
First gave these fair things motion, all at one
Made lightsome hope; but lightsome hope was none
When down the slope there came with lifted head
And back-blown mane and caverned mouth and red,
A lion, roaring, all the air ashake
That heard his hunger. Upward flight to take
No heart was mine, for where the further way
Mine anxious eyes explored, a she-wolf lay,
That licked lean flanks, and waited. Such was she
In aspect ruthless that I quaked to see,
And where she lay among her bones had brought
So many to grief before, that all my thought
Aghast turned backward to the sunless night
I left. But while I plunged in headlong flight
To that most feared before, a shade, or man
(Either he seemed), obstructing where I ran,
Called to me with a voice that few should know,
Faint from forgetful silence, "Where ye go,
Take heed. Why turn ye from the upward way?"

I cried, "Or come ye from warm earth, or they
The grave hath taken, in my mortal need
Have mercy thou!"

He answered, "Shade am I,
That once was man; beneath the Lombard sky,
In the late years of Julius born, and bred
In Mantua, till my youthful steps were led

To Rome, where yet the false gods lied to man;
And when the great Augustan age began,
I wrote the tale of Ilium burnt, and how
Anchises' son forth-pushed a venturous prow,
Seeking unknown seas. But in what mood art thou
To thus return to all the ills ye fled,
The while the mountain of thy hope ahead
Lifts into light, the source and cause of all
Delectable things that may to man befall?"

I answered, "Art thou then that Virgil, he
From whom all grace of measured speech in me
Derived? O glorious and far-guiding star!
Now may the love-led studious hours and long
In which I learnt how rich thy wonders are,
Master and Author mine of Light and Song,
Befriend me now, who knew thy voice, that few
Yet hearken. All the name my work hath won
Is thine of right, from whom I learned. To thee,
Abashed, I grant it. . . Why the mounting sun
No more I seek, ye scarce should ask, who see
The beast that turned me, nor faint hope have I
To force that passage if thine aid deny."

He answered, "Would ye leave this wild and live,
Strange road is ours, for where the she-wolf lies
Shall no man pass, except the path he tries
Her craft entangle. No way fugitive
Avoids the seeking of her greeds, that give
Insatiate hunger, and such vice perverse
As makes her leaner while she feeds, and worse
Her craving. And the beasts with which she breed
The noisome numerous beasts her lusts require,
Bare all the desirable lands in which she feeds;
Nor shall lewd feasts and lewder matings tire
Until she woos, in evil hour for her,
The wolfhound that shall rend her. His desire
Is not for rapine, as the promptings stir
Of her base heart; but wisdoms, and devoirs
Of manhood, and love's rule, his thoughts prefer.
The Italian lowlands he shall reach and save,

For which Camilla of old, the virgin brave,
Turnus and Nisus died in strife. His chase
He shall not cease, nor any cowering-place
Her fear shall find her, till he drive her back,
From city to city exiled, from wrack to wrack
Slain out of life, to find the native hell
Whence envy loosed her.

For thyself were well
To follow where I lead, and thou shalt see
The spirits in pain, and hear the hopeless woe,
The unending cries, of those whose only plea
Is judgment, that the second death to be
Fall quickly. Further shalt thou climb, and go
To those who burn, but in their pain content
With hope of pardon; still beyond, more high,
Holier than opens to such souls as I,
The Heavens uprear; but if thou wilt, is one
Worthier, and she shall guide thee there, where none
Who did the Lord of those fair realms deny
May enter. There in his city He dwells, and there
Rules and pervades in every part, and calls
His chosen ever within the sacred walls.
O happiest, they!"

I answered, "By that Go
Thou didst not know, I do thine aid entreat,
And guidance, that beyond the ills I meet
I safety find, within the Sacred Gate
That Peter guards, and those sad souls to see
Who look with longing for their end to be."

Then he moved forward, and behind I trod.

Canto II

THE day was falling, and the darkening air
Released earth's creatures from their toils, while I,
I only, faced the bitter road and bare
My Master led. I only, must defy
The powers of pity, and the night to be.

So thought I, but the things I came to see,
Which memory holds, could never thought forecast.
O Muses high! O Genius, first and last!
Memories intense! Your utmost powers combine
To meet this need. For never theme as mine
Strained vainly, where your loftiest nobleness
Must fail to be sufficient.

First I said,
Fearing, to him who through the darkness led,
"O poet, ere the arduous path ye press
Too far, look in me, if the worth there be
To make this transit. &AELIG;neas once, I know,
Went down in life, and crossed the infernal sea;
And if the Lord of All Things Lost Below
Allowed it, reason seems, to those who see
The enduring greatness of his destiny,
Who in the Empyrean Heaven elect was called
Sire of the Eternal City, that throned and walled
Made Empire of the world beyond, to be
The Holy Place at last, by God's decree,
Where the great Peter's follower rules. For he
Learned there the causes of his victory.

"And later to the third great Heaven was caught
The last Apostle, and thence returning brought
The proofs of our salvation. But, for me,
I am not &AELIG;neas, nay, nor Paul, to see
Unspeakable things that depths or heights can show,
And if this road for no sure end I go
What folly is mine? But any words are weak.
Thy wisdom further than the things I speak
Can search the event that would be."

Here I stayed
My steps amid the darkness, and the Shade
That led me heard and turned, magnanimous,
And saw me drained of purpose halting thus,
And answered, "If thy coward-born thoughts be clear,
And all thy once intent, infirmed of fear,
Broken, then art thou as scared beasts that shy
From shadows, surely that they know not why

Nor wherefore. . . Hearken, to confound thy fear,
The things which first I heard, and brought me here.
One came where, in the Outer Place, I dwell,
Suspense from hope of Heaven or fear of Hell,
Radiant in light that native round her clung,
And cast her eyes our hopeless Shades among
(Eyes with no earthly like but heaven's own blue),
And called me to her in such voice as few
In that grim place had heard, so low, so clear,
So toned and cadenced from the Utmost Sphere,
The Unattainable Heaven from which she came.
'O Mantuan Spirit,' she said, 'whose lasting fame
Continues on the earth ye left, and still
With Time shall stand, an earthly friend to me,
- My friend, not fortune's - climbs a path so ill
That all the night-bred fears he hastes to flee
Were kindly to the thing he nears. The tale
Moved through the peace of I leaven, and swift I sped
Downward, to aid my friend in love's avail,
With scanty time therefor, that half I dread
Too late I came. But thou shalt haste, and go
With golden wisdom of thy speech, that so
For me be consolation. Thou shalt say,
"I come from Beatricë." Downward far,
From Heaven to I leaven I sank, from star to star,
To find thee, and to point his rescuing way.
Fain would I to my place of light return;
Love moved me from it, and gave me power to learn
Thy speech. When next before my Lord I stand
I very oft shall praise thee.'

Here she ceased,

And I gave answer to that dear command,
'Lady, alone through whom the whole race of those
The smallest Heaven the moon's short orbits hold
Excels in its creation, not thy least,
Thy lightest wish in this dark realm were told
Vainly. But show me why the Heavens uncloze
To loose thee from them, and thyself content
Couldst thus continue in such strange descent
From that most Spacious Place for which ye burn,

And while ye further left, would fain return.'

" 'That which thou wouldst,' she said, 'I briefly tell.
There is no fear nor any hurt in Hell,
Except that it be powerful. God in me
Is gracious, that the piteous sights I see
I share not, nor myself can shrink to feel
The flame of all this burning. One there is
In height among the Holiest placed, and she
- Mercy her name - among God's mysteries
Dwells in the midst, and hath the power to see
His judgments, and to break them. This sharp
I tell thee, when she saw, she called, that so
Leaned Lucia toward her while she spake - and said,
"One that is faithful to thy name is sped,
Except that now ye aid him." She thereat,
- Lucia, to all men's wrongs inimical -
Left her High Place, and crossed to where I sat
In speech with Rachel (of the first of all
God saved). "O Beatrice, Praise of God,"
- So said she to me - "sitt'st thou here so slow
To aid him, once on earth that loved thee so
That all he left to serve thee? Hear'st thou not
The anguish of his plaint? and dost not see,
By that dark stream that never seeks a sea,
The death that threatens him?"

None, as thus she said,
None ever was swift on earth his good to chase,
None ever on earth was swift to leave his dread,
As came I downward from that sacred place
To find thee and invoke thee, confident
Not vainly for his need the gold were spent
Of thy word-wisdom.' Here she turned away,
Her bright eyes clouded with their tears, and I,
Who saw them, therefore made more haste to reach
The place she told, and found thee. Canst thou say
I failed thy rescue? Is the beast anigh
From which ye quailed? When such dear saints beseech
- Three from the Highest - that Heaven thy course allow
Why halt ye fearful? In such guards as thou

The faintest-hearted might be bold."
As flowers,
Close-folded through the cold and lightless hours,
Their bended stems erect, and opening fair
Accept the white light and the warmer air
Of morning, so my fainting heart anew
Lifted, that heard his comfort. Swift I spake,
"O courteous thou, and she compassionate!
Thy haste that saved me, and her warning true,
Beyond my worth exalt me. Thine I make
My will. In concord of one mind from now,
O Master and my Guide, where ledest thou
I follow."

And we, with no more words' delay,
Went forward on that hard and dreadful way.

Canto III

*THE gateway to the city of Doom. Through me
The entrance to the Everlasting Pain.
The Gateway of the Lost. The Eternal Three
Justice impelled to build me. Here ye see
Wisdom Supreme at work, and Primal Power,
And Love Supernal in their dawnless day.
Ere from their thought creation rose in flower
Eternal first were all things fixed as they.
Of Increate Power infinite formed am I
That deathless as themselves I do not die.
Justice divine has weighed: the doom is clear.
All hope renounce, ye lost, who enter here.
This scroll in gloom above the gate I read,
And found it fearful. "Master, hard," I said,
"This saying to me." And he, as one that long
Was custom'd, answered, "No distrust must wrong
Its Maker, nor thy coward mood resume
If here ye enter. This the place of doom
I told thee, where the lost in darkness dwell.
Here, by themselves divorced from light, they fell,
And are as ye shall see them." Here he lent*

A hand to draw me through the gate, and bent
A glance upon my fear so confident
That I, too nearly to my former dread
Returned, through all my heart was comforted,
And downward to the secret things we went.

Downward to night, but not of moon and cloud,
Not night with all its stars, as night we know,
But burdened with an ocean-weight of woe
The darkness closed us.

Sighs, and wailings loud,
Outcries perpetual of recruited pain,
Sounds of strange tongues, and angers that remain
Vengeless for ever, the thick and clamorous crowd
Of discords pressed, that needs I wept to hear,
First hearing. There, with reach of hands anear,
And voices passion-hoarse, or shrilled with fright,
The tumult of the everlasting night,
As sand that dances in continual wind,
Turns on itself for ever.

And I, my head
Begirt with movements, and my ears bedinned
With outcries round me, to my leader said,
"Master, what hear I? Who so overborne
With woes are these?"

He answered, "These be they
That praiseless lived and blameless. Now the scorn
Of Height and Depth alike, abortions drear;
Cast with those abject angels whose delay
To join rebellion, or their Lord defend,
Waiting their proved advantage, flung them here. -
Chased forth from Heaven, lest else its beauties end
The pure perfection of their stainless claim,
Out-herded from the shining gate they came,
Where the deep hells refused them, lest the lost
Boast something baser than themselves."

And I,
"Master, what grievance hath their failure cost,
That through the lamentable dark they cry?"

He answered, "Briefly at a thing not worth
We glance, and pass forgetful. Hope in death
They have not. Memory of them on the earth
Where once they lived remains not. Nor the breath
Of Justice shall condemn, nor Mercy plead,
But all alike disdain them. That they know
Themselves so mean beneath aught else constrains
The envious outcries that too long ye heed.
Move past, but speak not."

Then I looked, and lo,
Were souls in ceaseless and unnumbered trains
That past me whirled unending, vainly led
Nowhither, in useless and unpausing haste.
A fluttering ensign all their guide, they chased
Themselves for ever. I had not thought the dead,
The whole world's dead, so many as these. I saw
The shadow of him elect to Peter's seat
Who made the great refusal, and the law,
The unswerving law that left them this retreat
To seal the abortion of their lives, became
Illumined to me, and themselves I knew,
To God and all his foes the futile crew
How hateful in their everlasting shame.

I saw these victims of continued death
- For lived they never - were naked all, and loud
Around them closed a never-ceasing cloud
Of hornets and great wasps, that buzzed and clung,
- Weak pain for weaklings meet, - and where they stung,
Blood from their faces streamed, with sobbing breath,
And all the ground beneath with tears and blood
Was drenched, and crawling in that loathsome mud
There were great worms that drank it.

Gladly thence
I gazed far forward. Dark and wide the flood
That flowed before us. On the nearer shore
Were people waiting. "Master, show me whence
These came, and who they be, and passing hence
Where go they? Wherefore wait they there content,
- The faint light shows it, - for their transit o'er

The unbridged abyss?"

He answered, "When we stand
Together, waiting on the joyless strand,
In all it shall be told thee." If he meant
Reproof I know not, but with shame I bent
My downward eyes, and no more spake until
The bank we reached, and on the stream beheld
A bark ply toward us.

Of exceeding eld,
And hoary showed the steersman, screaming shrill,
With horrid glee the while he neared us, "Woe
To ye, depraved! - Is here no Heaven, but ill
The place where I shall herd ye. Ice and fire
And darkness are the wages of their hire
Who serve unceasing here - But thou that there
Dost wait though live, depart ye. Yea, forbear!
A different passage and a lighter fare
Is destined thine."

But here my guide replied,
"Nay, Charon, cease; or to thy grief ye chide.
It There is willed, where that is willed shall be,
That ye shall pass him to the further side,
Nor question more."

The fleecy cheeks thereat,
Blown with fierce speech before, were drawn and flat,
And his flame-circled eyes subdued, to hear
That mandate given. But those of whom he spake
In bitter glee, with naked limbs ashake,
And chattering teeth received it. Seemed that then
They first were conscious where they came, and fear
Abject and frightful shook them; curses burst
In clamorous discords forth; the race of men,
Their parents, and their God, the place, the time,
Of their conceptions and their births, accursed
Alike they called, blaspheming Heaven. But yet
Slow steps toward the waiting bark they set,
With terrible wailing while they moved. And so
They came reluctant to the shore of woe
That waits for all who fear not God, and not
Them only.

Then the demon Charon rose
To herd them in, with eyes that furnace-hot
Glowed at the task, and lifted oar to smite
Who lingered.

As the leaves, when autumn shows,
One after one descending, leave the bough,
Or doves come downward to the call, so now
The evil seed of Adam to endless night,
As Charon signalled, from the shore's bleak height,
Cast themselves downward to the bark. The brown
And bitter flood received them, and while they passed
Were others gathering, patient as the last,
Not conscious of their nearing doom.

"My son,"

- Replied my guide the unspoken thought - "is none
Beneath God's wrath who dies in field or town,
Or earth's wide space, or whom the waters drown,
But here he cometh at last, and that so spurred
By Justice, that his fear, as those ye heard,
Impels him forward like desire. Is not
One spirit of all to reach the fatal spot
That God's love holdeth, and hence, if Char
chide,
Ye well may take it. - Raise thy heart, for now,
Constrained of Heaven, he must thy course allow."

Yet how I passed I know not. For the ground
Trembled that heard him, and a fearful sound
Of issuing wind arose, and blood-red light
Broke from beneath our feet, and sense and sight
Left me. The memory with cold sweat once more
Reminds me of the sudden-crimsoned night,
As sank I senseless by the dreadful shore.

Canto IV

ARISING thunder from the vast Abyss
First roused me, not as he that rested wakes
From slumbrous hours, but one rude fury shakes

Untimely, and around I gazed to know
The place of my confining.

Deep, profound,
Dark beyond sight, and choked with doleful sound,
Sheer sank the Valley of the Lost Abyss,
Beneath us. On the utmost brink we stood,
And like the winds of some unresting wood
The gathered murmur from those depths of woe
Soughed upward into thunder. Out from this
The unceasing sound comes ever. I might not tell
How deep the Abyss down sank from hell to hell,
It was so clouded and so dark no sight
Could pierce it.

"Downward through the worlds of night
We will descend together. I first, and thou
My footsteps taking," spake my guide, and I
Gave answer, "Master, when thyself art pale,
Fear-daunted, shall my weaker heart avail
That on thy strength was rested?"

"Nay," said he,
"Not fear, but anguish at the issuing cry
So pales me. Come ye, for the path we tread
Is long, and time requires it." Here he led
Through the first entrance of the ringed abyss,
Inward, and I went after, and the woe
Softened behind us, and around I heard
Nor scream of torment, nor blaspheming word,
But round us sighs so many and deep there came
That all the air was motioned. I beheld
Concourse of men and women and children there
Countless. No pain was theirs of cold or flame,
But sadness only. And my Master said,
"Art silent here? Before ye further go
Among them wondering, it is meet ye know
They are not sinful, nor the depths below
Shall claim them. But their lives of righteousness
Sufficed not to redeem. The gate decreed,
Being born too soon, we did not pass (for I,
Dying unbaptized, am of them). More nor less
Our doom is weighed, - to feel of Heaven the need,

To long, and to be hopeless."

Grief was mine

That heard him, thinking what great names must be

In this suspense around me. "Master, tell,"

I questioned, "from this outer girth of Hell

Pass any to the blessed spheres exalt,

Through other's merits or their own the fault.

Condoned?" And he, my covert speech that read,

- For surance sought I of my faith, - replied,

"Through the shrunk hells there came a Great One, crowned

And garmented with conquest. Of the dead,

He rescued from us him who earliest died,

Abel, and our first parent. Here He found,

Abraham, obedient to the Voice he heard;

And Moses, first who wrote the Sacred Word;

Isaac, and Israel and his sons, and she,

Rachel, for whom he travailed; and David, king;

And many beside unnumbered, whom he led

Triumphant from the dark abodes, to be

Among the blest for ever. Until this thing

I witnessed, none, of all the countless dead,

But hopeless through the somber gate he came."

Now while he spake he paused not, but pursued,

Through the dense woods of thronging spirits, his aim

Straight onward, nor was long our path until

Before us rose a widening light, to fill

One half of all the darkness, and I knew

While yet some distance, that such Shades were there

As nobler moved than others, and questioned, "Who,

Master, are those that in their aspect bear

Such difference from the rest?"

"All these," he said,

"Were named so glorious in thy earth above

That Heaven allows their larger claim to be

Select, as thus ye see them."

While he spake

A voice rose near us: "Hail!" it cried, "for he

Returns, who was departed."

Scarce it ceased

When four great spirits approached. They did not show
Sadness nor joy, but tranquil-eyed as though
Content in their dominion moved. My guide
Before I questioned told, "That first ye see,
With hand that fits the swordhilt, mark, for he
Is Homer, sovereign of the craft we tried,
Leader and lord of even the following three, -
Horace, and Ovid, and Lucan. The voice ye heard,
That hailed me, caused them by one impulse stirred
Approach to do me honour, for these agree
In that one name we boast, and so do well
Owning it in me." There was I joyed to meet
Those shades, who closest to his place belong,
The eagle course of whose out-soaring song
Is lonely in height.

Some space apart (to tell,
It may be, something of myself), my guide
Conversed, until they turned with grace to greet
Me also, and my Master smiled to see
They made me sixth and equal. Side by side
We paced toward the widening light, and spake
Such things as well were spoken there, and here
Were something less than silence.

Strong and wide
Before us rose a castled height, beset
With sevenfold-circling walls, unscalable,
And girdled with a rivulet round, but yet
We passed thereover, and the water clear
As dry land bore me; and the walls ahead
Their seven strong gates made open one by one,
As each we neared, that where my Master led
With ease I followed, although without were none
But deep that stream beyond their wading spread,
And closed those gates beyond their breach had been,
Had they sought entry with us.

Of coolest green
Stretched the wide lawns we midmost found, for there,
Intolerant of itself, was Hell made fair
To accord with its containing.

Grave, austere,

Quiet-voiced and slow, of seldom words were they
That walked that verdure.

To a place aside
Open, and light, and high, we passed, and here
Looked downward on the lawns, in clear survey
Of such great spirits as are my glory and pride
That once I saw them.

There, direct in view,
Electra passed, among her sons. I knew
Hector and Æneas there; and Cæsar too
Was of them, armed and falcon-eyed; and there
Camilla and Penthesilea. Near there sate
Lavinia, with her sire the Latian king;
Brutus, who drave the Tarquin; and Lucrece
Julia, Cornelia, Marcia, and their kin;
And, by himself apart, the Saladin.

Somewhat beyond I looked. A place more high
Than where these heroes moved I gazed, and knew
The Master of reasoned thought, whose hand withdrew
The curtain of the intellect, and bared
The secret things of nature; while anigh,
But lowlier, grouped the greatest names that shared
His searchings. All regard and all revere
They gave him. Plato there, and Socrates
I marked, who closeliest reached his height; and near
Democritus, who dreamed a world of chance
Born blindly in the whirl of circumstance;
And Anaxagoras, Diogenes,
Thales, Heraclitus, Empedocles,
Zeno, were there; and Dioscorides
Who searched the healing powers of herbs and trees;
And Orpheus, Tullius, Livius, Seneca,
Euclid and Ptolemæus; Avicenna,
Galen, Hippocrates; Avernhoës,
The Master's great interpreter, - but these
Are few to those I saw, an endless dream
Of shades before whom Hell quietened and cowered. My theme,
With thronging recollections of mighty names
That there I marked impedes me. All too long

They chase me, envious that my burdened song
Forgets. - But onward moves my guide anew:
The light behind us fades: the six are two:
Again the shuddering air, the cries of Hell
Compassed, and where we walked the darkness fell.

Canto V

MOST like the spirals of a pointed shell,
But separate each, go downward, hell from hell,
The ninefold circles of the damned; but each
Smaller, concentrate in its greater pain,
Than that which overhangs it.

Those who reach
The second whorl, on entering, learn their bane
Where Minos, hideous, sits and snarls. He hears,
Decides, and as he girds himself they go.

Before his seat each ill-born spirit appear,
And tells its tale of evil, loath or no,
While he, their judge, of all sins cognizant,
Hears, and around himself his circling tail
Twists to the number of the depths below
To which they doom themselves in telling.

Alway
The crowding sinners: their turn they wait: they show
Their guilt: the circles of his tail convey
Their doom: and downward they are whirled away.

"O thou who callest at this doleful inn,"
Cried Minos to me, while the child of sin
That stood confessing before him, trembling stayed,
"Heed where thou enterest in thy trust, nor say,
I walk in safety, for the width of way
Suffices."

But my guide the answer took,
"Why dost thou cry? or leave thine ordered trade
For that which nought belongs thee? Hinder not
His destined path. For where he goeth is willed,

Where that is willed prevaileth."

Now was filled

The darker air with wailing. Wailing shook
My soul to hear it. Where we entered now
No light attempted. Only sound arose,
As ocean with the tortured air contends,
What time intolerable tempest rends
The darkness; so the shrieking winds oppose
For ever, and bear they, as they swerve and sweep,
The doomed disastrous spirits, and whirl aloft,
Backward, and down, nor any rest allow,
Nor pause of such contending wraths as oft
Batter them against the precipitous sides, and there
The shrieks and moanings quench the screaming air,
The cries of their blaspheming.

These are they

That lust made sinful. As the starlings rise
At autumn, darkening all the colder skies,
In crowded troops their wings up-bear, so here
These evil-doers on each contending blast
Were lifted upward, whirled, and downward cast,
And swept around unceasing. Striving airs
Lift them, and hurl, nor ever hope is theirs
Of rest or respite or decreasing pains,
But like the long streaks of the calling cranes
So came they wailing down the winds, to meet
Upsweeping blasts that ever backward beat
Or sideward flung them on their walls. And I -
"Master who are they next that drive anigh
So scourged amidst the blackness?"

"These," he said,

"So lashed and harried, by that queen are led,
Empress of alien tongues, Semiramis,
Who made her laws her lawless lusts to kiss,
So was she broken by desire; and this
Who comes behind, back-blown and beaten thus,
Love's fool, who broke her faith to Sichæus,
Dido; and bare of all her luxury,
Nile's queen, who lost her realm for Antony."

And after these, amidst that windy train,
Helen, who soaked in blood the Trojan plain,
And great Achilles I saw, at last whose feet
The same net trammelled; and Tristram, Paris, he showed;
And thousand other along the fated road
Whom love led deathward through disastrous things
He pointed as they passed, until my mind
Was wildered in this heavy pass to find
Ladies so many, and cavaliers and kings
Fallen, and pitying past restraint, I said,
"Poet, those next that on the wind appear
So light, and constant as they drive or veer
Are parted never, I fain would speak."

And he, -

"Conjure them by their love, and thou shalt see
Their flight come hither."

And when the swerving blast
Most nearly bent, I called them as they passed,
"O wearied souls, come downward, if the Power
That drives allow ye, for one restful hour."
As doves, desirous of their nest at night,
Cleave through the dusk with swift and open flight
Of level-lifting wings, that love makes light,
Will-borne, so downward through the murky air
Came those sad spirits, that not deep Hell's despair
Could sunder, parting from the faithless band
That Dido led, and with one voice, as though
One soul controlled them, spake,

"O Animate!

Who comest through the black malignant air,
Benign among us who this exile bear
For earth ensanguined, if the King of All
Heard those who from the outer darkness call
Entreat him would we for thy peace, that thou
Hast pitied us condemned, misfortunate. -
Of that which please thee, if the winds allow,
Gladly I tell. Ravenna, on that shore
Where Po finds rest for all his streams, we knew;
And there love conquered. Love, in gentle heart
So quick to take dominion, overthrew

Him with my own fair body, and overbore
Me with delight to please him. Love, which gives
No pardon to the loved, so strongly in me
Was empirod, that its rule, as here ye see,
Endureth, nor the bitter blast contrives
To part us. Love to one death led us. The mode
Afflicts me, shrinking, still. The place of Cain
Awaits our slayer."

They ceased, and I my head
Bowed down, and made no answer, till my guide
Questioned, "What wouldst thou more?" and replied,
"Alas my thought I what sweet keen longings led
These spirits, woeful, to their dark abode!"
And then to them, - "Francesca, all thy pain
Is mine. With pity and grief I weep. But say
How, in the time of sighing, and in what way,
Love gave you of the dubious deeds to know."

And she to me, "There is no greater woe
In all Hell's depths than cometh when those who
Look back to Eden. But if thou wouldst learn
Our love's first root, I can but weep and tell.
One day, and for delight in idleness,
- Alone we were, without suspicion, -
We read together, and chanced the page to turn
Where Galahad tells the tale of Lancelot,
How love constrained him. Oft our meeting eyes,
Confessed the theme, and conscious cheeks were hot,
Reading, but only when that instant came
Where the surrendering lips were kissed, no less
Desire beat in us, and whom, for all this pain,
No hell shall sever (so great at least our gain),
Trembling, he kissed my mouth, and all forgot,
We read no more."

As thus did one confess
Their happier days, the other wept, and I
Grew faint with pity, and sank as those who die.

Canto VI

THE misery of that sight of souls in Hell
Condemned, and constant in their loss, prevailed
So greatly in me, that I may not tell
How passed I from them, sense and memory failed
So far.

But here new torments I discern,
And new tormented, wheresoe'er I turn.
For sodden around me was the place of bane,
The third doomed circle, where the culprits know
The cold, unceasing, and relentless rain
Pour down without mutation. Heavy with hail,
With turbid waters mixed, and cold with snow,
It streams from out the darkness, and below
The soil is putrid, where the impious lie
Groveling, and howl like dogs, beneath the flail
That flattens to the foul soaked ground, and try
Vainly for ease by turning. And the while
Above them roams and ravens the loathsome hound
Cerberus, and feeds upon them.

The swampy ground
He ranges; with his long clawed hands he grips
The sinners, and the fierce and hairy lips
(Thrice-headed is he) tear, and the red blood drips
From all his jaws. He clutches, and flays, and rends,
And treads them, growling: and the flood descends
Straight downward.

When he saw us, the loathly worm
Showed all his fangs, and eager trembling frame
Nerved for the leap. But undeterred my guide.
Stooped down, and gathered in full hands the soil,
And cast it in the gaping gullets, to foil
Gluttonous blind greed, and those fierce mouths and wide
Closed on the filth, and as the craving cur
Quietens, that strained and howled to reach his food,
Biting the bone, those squalid mouths subdued
And silenced, wont above the empty dead
To bark insatiate, while they tore unfed
The writhing shadows.

The straight persistent rain,
That altered never, had pressed the miry plain

With flattened shades that in their emptiness
Still showed as bodies. We might not here progress
Except we trod them. Of them all, but one
Made motion as we passed. Against the rain
Rising, and resting on one hand, he said,
"O thou, who through the drenching murk art led,
Recall me if thou canst. Thou wast begun
Before I ended."

I, who looked in vain
For human semblance in that bestial shade,
Made answer, "Misery here hath all unmade,
It may be, that thou wast on earth, for nought
Recalls thee to me. But thyself shalt tell
The sins that scourged thee to this foul resort,
That more displeasing not the scope of Hell
Can likely yield, though greater pains may lie
More deep."

And he to me, "Thy city, so high
With envious hates that swells, that now the sack
Bursts, and pours out in ruin, and spreads its wrack
Far outward, was mine alike, while clearer air
Still breathed I. Citizens who knew me there
Called me Ciacco. For the vice I fed
At rich men's tables, in this filth I lie
Drenched, beaten, hungered, cold, uncomforted,
Mauled by that ravening greed; and these, as I,
With gluttonous lives the like reward have won."

I answered, "Piteous is thy state to one
Who knew thee in thine old repute, but say,
If yet persists thy previous mind, which way
The feuds of our rent city shall end, and why
These factions vex us, and if still there be
One just man left among us."

"Two," said he,
"Are just, but none regards them. Yet more high
The strife, till bloodshed from their long contend
Shall issue at last: the barbarous Cerchi clan
Cast the Donati exiled out, and they
Within three years return, and more offend

Than they were erst offended, helped by him
So long who palter with both parts. The fire
Three sparks have lighted - Avarice, Envy, Pride, -
And there is none may quench it."

Here he ceased

His lamentable tale, and I replied,
"Of one thing more I ask thee. Great desire
Is mine to learn it. Where are those who sought
Our welfare earlier? Those whose names at least
Are fragrant for the public good they wrought,
Arrigo, Mosca, and the Tegghiaio
Worthiest, and Farinata, and with these
Jacopo Rusticucci. I would know
If soft in Heaven or bitter-hard in Hell
Their lives continue."

"Cast in hells more low

Than yet thou hast invaded, deep they lie,
For different crimes from ours, and shouldst thou go
So far, thou well mayst see them. If thou tread
Again the sweet light land, and overhead
Converse with those I knew there, then recall,
I pray, my memory to my friends of yore.
But ask no further, for I speak no more."

Thereon his eyes, that straight had gazed before
Squinted and failed, and slowly sank his head,
And blindly with his sodden mates he lay.
And spake my guide, "He shall not lift nor stir,
Until the trumpet shrills that wakens Hell;
And these, who must inimical Power obey,
Shall each return to his sad grave, and there
In carnal form the sinful spirit shall dwell
Once more, and that time only, from the tomb
Rising to hear the irrevocable doom
Which shall reverberate through eternity."

So paced we slowly through the rain that fell
Unchanging, over that foul ground, and trod
The dismal spirits it held, and somewhat spake
Of life beyond us, and the things of God;

And asked I, "Master, shall these torments cease,
Continue as they are, or more increase,
When calls the trumpet, and the graves shall break,
And the great Sentence sound?"

And he to me,

"Recall thy learning, as thou canst. We know
With more perfection, greater pain or bliss
Resolves, and though perfection may not be
To these accurs'd, yet nearer then than this
It may be they shall reach it."

More to show

He sought, as turned we to the fresh descent,
But speaking all in such strange words as went
Past me. - But ceased our downward path, and
Plutus, of human weal the hateful foe.

Canto VII

HAH, strange! ho, Satan!" such the sounds half-heard
The thick voice gobbled, the while the foul, inflamed,
Distended visage toward us turned, and cast
Invective from its bestial throat, that slurred
Articulate speech. But here the gentle sage,
Who knew beforehand that we faced, to me
Spake first, "Regard not; for a threat misaimed
Falls idle. Fear not to continue past.
His power to us, however else it be,
Is not to hinder." Then, that bulk inflate
Confronting, - "Peace, thou greed! thy lusting rage
Consume thee inward! Not thy word we wait
The path to open. It is willed on high, -
There, where the Angel of the Sword ye know
Took ruin upon the proud adultery
Of him thou callest as thy prince."

Thereat

As sails, wind-rounded, when the mast gives way,
Sink tangled to the deck, deflated so
Collapsed that bulk that heard him, shrunk and flat;
And we went downward till before us lay

The fourth sad circle. Ah! what woes contain,
Justice of God! what woes those narrowing deeps
Contain; for all the universe down-heaps
In this pressed space its continent of pain,
So voiding all that mars its peace. But why
This guilt that so degrades us?

As the surge

Above Charybdis meets contending surge,
Breaks and is broken, and rages and recoils
For ever, so here the sinners. More numerous
Than in the circles past are these. They urge
Huge weights before them. On, with straining breasts,
They roll them, howling in their ceaseless toils.
And those that to the further side belong
Do likewise, meeting in the midst, and thus
Crash vainly, and recoil, reverse, and cry,
"Why dost thou hold?" "Why dost thou loose?"

No rest

Their doom permits them. Backward course they bend;
Continual crescents trace, at either end
Meeting again in fresh rebound, and high
Above their travail reproachful howlings rise
Incessant at those who thwart their round.

And I,

Who felt my heart stung through with anguish, said,
"O Master, show me who these peoples be,
And if those tonsured shades that left we see
Held priestly office ere they joined the dead."

He answered, "These, who with such squinting eyes
Regarded God's providing, that they spent
In waste immoderate, indicate their guilt
In those loud barkings that ye hear. They spilt
Their wealth distemperate; and those they meet
Who cry 'Why loose ye?' avarice ruled: they bent
Their minds on earth to seize and hoard. Of these
Hairless, are priests, and popes, and cardinals,
For greed makes empire in such hearts complete."

And I, "Among them that these vices eat

Are none that I have known on earth before?"

He answered, "Vainly wouldst thou seek; a life
So blind to bounties has obscured too far
The souls once theirs, for that which once they wore
Of mortal likeness in their shades to show.
Waste was their choice, and this abortive strife
And toil unmeaning is the end they are
They butt for ever, until the last award
Shall call them from their graves. Ill-holding those
Ill-loosing these, alike have doomed to know
This darkness, and the fairer world forgo.
Behold what mockery doth their fate afford!
It needs no fineness of spun words to tell.
For *this* they did their subtle wits oppose,
Contending for the gifts that Fortune straws
So blindly, - for this blind contending hell.

"Beneath the moon there is not gold so great
In worth, it could one moment's grief abate,
Or rest one only of these weary souls."

"Master, this Fortune that ye speak, whose claws
Grasp all desirable things of earth," I said,
"What is she?"

"O betrayed in foolishness I
Blindness of creatures born of earth, whose goals
Are folly and loss!" he answered, "I would make
Thy mouth an opening for this truth I show.

"Transcendent Wisdom, when the spheres He built
Gave each a guide to rule it: more nor less
Their light distributes. For the earth he gave
Like guide to rule its splendours. As we know
The heavenly lights move round us, and is spilt
Light here, and darkness yonder, so doth she
From man to man, from race and kindred take
Alternate wealth, or yield it. None may save
The spoil that she depriveth: none may flee
The bounty that she wills. No human wits

May hinder, nor may human lore reject
Her choice, that like a hidden snake is set
To reach the feet unheeding. Where she sits
In judgment, she resolves, and whom she wills
Is havened, chased by petulant storms, or wreck
Remedeless. Races cease, and men forget
They were. Slaves rise to rule their lords. She
And empties, godlike in her mood. No pause
Her changes leave, so many are those who call
About her gates, so many she dowers, and all
Revile her after, and would crucify
If words could reach her, but she heeds nor hears,
Who dwells beyond the noise of human laws
In the blest silence of the Primal Spheres.

- But let us to the greater woes descend.
The stars from their meridian fall, that rose
When first these hells we entered. Long to stay
Our right of path allows not."

While he spake

We crossed the circle to the bank beyond,
And found a hot spring boiling, and a way,
Dark, narrow, and steep, that down beside it goes,
By which we clambered. Purple-black the pond
Beneath it, widening to a marsh that spreads
Far out, and struggling in that slime malign
Were muddied shades, that not with hands, heads,
And teeth and feet besides, contending tore,
And maimed each other in beast-like rage.

My guide

Expounded, "Those whom anger overbore
On earth, behold ye. Mark the further sign
Of bubbles countless on the slime that show.
These from the sobs of those immersed arise;
For buried in the choking filth they cry,
*We once were sullen in the rain-sweet air,
When waked the light, and all the earth was fair,
How sullen in the murky swamp we lie
Forbidden from the blessed light on high.*
This song they gurgle in their throats, that so

The bubbles rising from the depths below
Break all the surface of the slime."

Between

The high bank and the putrid swamp was seen
A narrow path, and this, a sweeping arc,
We traversed; outward o'er the surface dark
Still gazing, at the choking shades who took
That diet for their wrath. Till livelier look
Was forward drawn, for where at last we came
A great tower fronted, and a beacon's flame.

Canto VIII

I SAY, while yet from that tower's base afar,
We saw two flames of sudden signal rise,
And further, like a small and distant star,
A beacon answered.

"What before us lies?

Who signals our approach, and who replies?"
I asked, and answered he who all things knew,
"Already, if the swamp's dank fumes permit,
The outcome of their beacon shows in view,
Severing the liquid filth."

No shaft can slit

Impalpable air, from any corded bow,
As came that craft towards us, cleaving so,
And with incredible speed, the miry wave.
To where we paused its meteor course it clave,
A steersman rising in the stern, who cried,
"Behold thy doom, lost spirit!" To whom my guide,
"Nay, Phlegyas, Phlegyas, here thy cries are
We need thine aid the further shore to gain;
But power thou hast not."

One amazed to meet

With most unlooked and undeserved deceit
So rages inly; yet no dared reply
There came, as down my Leader stept, and I
Deepened the skiff with earthly weight undue,
Which while we seated swung its bows anew

Outward, and onward once again it flew,
Labouring more deep than wont, and slower now,
So burdened.

While that kennel of filth we clave,
There rose among the bubbles a mud-soaked head.
"Who art thou, here before thy time?" it said,
And answer to the unfeatured mask I gave,
"I come, but stay not. Who art thou, so blind
And blackened from the likeness of thy kind?"

"I have no name, but only tears," said he.

I answered, "Nay, however caked thou be,
I know thee through the muddied drench. For thee
Be weeping ever, accursed spirit."

At that,

He reached his hands to grasp the boat, whereat
My watchful Master thrust him down, and cried,
"Away, among the dogs, thy fellows!" and then
To me with approbation, "Blest art thou,
Who wouldst not pity in thy heart allow
For these, in arrogance of empty pride
Who lived so vainly. In the minds of men
Is no good thing of this one left to tell,
And hence his rage. How many above that dwell,
Now kinglike in their ways, at last shall lie
Wallowing in these wide marshes, swine in sty,
With all men's scorn to chase them down."

And I,

"Master, it were a seemly thing to see
This boaster trampled in the putrid sea,
Who dared approach us, knowing of all we know."

He answered, "Well thy wish, and surely so
It shall be, e'er the distant shore we view."
And I looked outward through the gloom, and lo!
The envious eaters of that dirt combined
Against him, leapt upon him, before, behind,
Dragged in their fury, and rent, and tore him through,
Screaming derisive, "Philip! whose horse-hooves shine

With silver," and the rageful Florentine
Turned on himself his gnashing teeth and tore.

But he deserveth, and I speak, no more.

Now, as we neared the further beach, I heard
The lamentable and unceasing wail
By which the air of all the hells is stirred
Increasing ever, which caused mine eyes unveil
Their keenest vision to search what came, and he
Who marked, indulgent, told. "Ahead we see
The city of Dis, with all its dolorous crew,
Numerous, and burdened with reliefless pain,
And guilt intolerable to think."

I said,

"Master, already through the night I view
The mosques of that sad city, that fiery red
As heated metal extend, and crowd the plain."
He answered, "These the eternal fire contain,
That pulsing through them sets their domes aglow."
At this we came those joyless walls below,
- Of iron I thought them, - with a circling moat;
But saw no entrance, and the burdened boat
Traced the deep fosse for half its girth, before
The steersman warned us. "Get ye forth. The shore
Is here, - and there the Entrance."

There, indeed,

The entrance. On the barred and burning gate
I gazed; a thousand of the fiends that rained
From Heaven, to fill that place disconsolate,
Looked downward, and derided. "Who," they said,
"Before his time comes hither? As though the dead
Arrive too slowly for the joys they would,"
And laughter rocked along their walls. My guide
Their mockery with an equal mien withstood,
Signalling their leaders he would speak aside,
And somewhat closing their contempt they cried,
"Then come thou hither, and let him backward go,
Who came so rashly. Let him find his way
Through the five hells ye traversed, the best he may.

He can but try it awhile! - But thou shalt stay,
And learn the welcome of these halls of woe."

Ye well may think how I, discomfited
By these accursed words, was moved. The dead,
Nay, nor the living were ever placed as I,
If this fiends' counsel triumphed. And who should try
That backward path unaided?

"Lord," I said,

"Loved Master, who hast shared my steps so far,
And rescued ever, if these our path would bar,
Then lead me backward in most haste, nor let
Their malice part us."

He with cheerful mien,

Gave answer. "Heed not that they boast. Forget
The fear thou showest, and in good heart abide,
While I go forward. Not these fiends obscene
Shall thwart the mandate that the Power supplied
By which we came, nor any force to do
The things they threaten is theirs; nor think that I
Should leave thee helpless here."

The gentle Sage

At this went forward. Feared I? Half I knew
Despair, and half contentment. Yes and no
Denied each other; and of so great a woe
Small doubt is anguish.

In their orgulous rage

The fiends out-crowded from the gates to meet
My Master; what he spake I could not hear;
But nothing his words availed to cool their heat,
For inward thronged they with a jostling rear
That clanged the gates before he reached, and he
Turned backward slowly, muttering, "Who to me
Denies the woeful houses?" This he said
Sighing, with downcast aspect and disturbed
Beyond concealment; yet some length he curbed
His anxious thought to cheer me. "Doubt ye nought
Of power to hurt in these fiends insolent;
For once the wider gate on which ye read
The words of doom, with greater pride, they sought

To close against the Highest. Already is bent
A great One hereward, whose unhindered way
Descends the steeps unaided. He shall say
Such words as must the trembling hells obey."

Canto IX

I THINK the paleness of the fear I showed
When he, rejected from that conference,
Rejoined me, caused him speak more confident
Than felt he inly. For the glance he sent
Through the dense darkness of the backward road
Denied the valour of his words' pretence;
And pausing there with anxious listening mien,
While came no sound, nor any help was seen,
He muttered, "Yet we must this conflict win,
For else - But whom her aid has pledged herein -
How long before he cometh!" And plain I knew
His words turned sideward from the ending due
They first portended. Faster beat my fear,
Methinks, than had he framed in words more clear
The meaning that his care withheld.

I said,

"Do others of the hopeless, sinless, dead,
Who with thee in the outmost circle dwell,
Come ever downward to the narrowing hell
That now we traverse?"

"Once Erichtho fell,"

He answered, "conjured to such end that I,
- Who then short time had passed to those who die, -
Came here, controlled by her discerning spell,
And entered through these hostile gates, and drew
A spirit from the darkest, deepest pit,
The place of Judas named, that centres Hell.
The path I learnt, and all its dangers well.
Content thine heart. This foul-stretched marsh surrounds
The dolorous city to its furthest bounds.
Without, the dense mirk, and the bubbling mire:
Within, the white-hot pulse of eating fire,

Whence this fiend-anger thwarts. . .," and more he said,
To save me doubtless from my thoughts, but I
Heeded no more, for by the beacons red
That on the lofty tower before us glowed,
Three bloodstained and infernal furies showed,
Erect, of female form in guise and limb,
But clothed in coils of hydras green and grim;
And with cerastes bound was every head,
And for its crown of hair was serpented;
And he, who followed my diverted gaze,
The handmaids of the Queen of Woeful Days
Well knowing, told me, "These the Furies three.
Megæra leftward: on the right is she
Alecto, wailing: and Tisiphone
Midmost."

These hateful, in their need of prey,
Tore their own breasts with bloodied claws, and when
They saw me, from the living world of men,
Beneath them standing, with one purpose they
Cried, and so loudly that I shrank for fear,
"Medusa! let her from her place appear,
To change him into stone! Our first default
That venged no wrath on Theseus' deep assault,
So brings him."

"Turn thou from their sight," my guide
Enjoined, nor wholly on my fear relied,
But placed his hands across mine eyes the while
He told me further "Risk no glance. The sight
Of Gorgon, if she cometh, would bring thee night
From which were no returning."

Ye that read
With wisdom to discern, ye well may heed
The hidden meaning of the truth that lies
Beneath the shadow-words of mysteries
That here I show ye.

While I turned away,
Across the blackness of the putrid bay,
There crashed a thunder of most fearful sound,
At which the opposing shores, from bound to bound,
Trembled.

As when an entering tempest rends
The brooding heat, and nought its course can stay,
That through the forest its dividing way
Tears open, and tramples down, and strips, and bends,
And levels. The wild things in the woods that be
Cower down. The herdsmen from its trumpets flee.
With clouds of dust to trace its course it goes,
Superb, and leaving ruin. Such sound arose.
And he that held me loosened mine eyes, and said,
"Look back, and see what foam the black waves bear."

As frogs, the while the serpent picks his prey,
In panic scatter through the stream, and there
Flatten themselves upon its bouldered bed,
I saw a thousand ruined spirits that fled
Before the coming of One who held his way
Dry-shod across the water.

His left hand

He waved before him, and the stagnant air
Retreated. Simple it were to understand
A Messenger of Heaven he came. My guide
Signed me to silence, and to reverence due,
While to one stroke of his indignant wand
The gate swung open. "Outcast spawn!" he cried,
His voice heard vibrant through the aperture grim,
"Why spurn ye at the Will that, once defied,
Here cast ye grovelling? Have ye felt from Him
Aught ever for fresh revolt but harder pains?
Has Cerberus' throat, skinned with the threefold chains,
No meaning? Why, to fate most impotent,
Contend ye vainly?"

Then he turned and went,
Nor one glance gave us, but he seemed as one
Whom larger issue than the instant done
Engages wholly.

By that Power compelled,
The gates stood open, and our course we held
Unhindered. As the threshold dread we crossed,
My eager glances swept the scene to know,
In those doomed walls imprisoned, how lived the lost.

On either hand a wide plain stretched, to show
A sight of torment, and most dismal woe.

At Arles, where the stagnant Rhone extends,
Or Pola, where the gulf Quarnero bends,
As with old tombs the plains are ridged, so here,
All sides, did rows of countless tombs appear,
But in more bitter a guise, for everywhere
Shone flames, that moved among them.

Every tomb

Stood open, white with heat. No craft requires
More heated metal than the crawling fires
Made hot the sides of those sad sepulchres;
And cries of torture and most dire despair
Came from them, as the spirits wailed their doom.

I said, "Who are they, in these chests that lie
Confined, and join in this lamenting cry?"

My Master answered, "These in life denied
The faith that saves, and that resisting pride
Here brought them. With their followers, like to like,
Assorted are they, and the keen flames strike
With differing anguish, to the same degree
They reached in their rebellion."

While he spake

Rightward he turned, a narrow path to take
Between them and that high-walled boundary.

Canto X

FIRST went my Master, for the space was small
Between the torments and the lofty wall,
And I behind him.

"O controlling Will,"

I spake, "who leadest through such hates, and still
Prevailest for me, wilt thou speak, that who
Within these tombs are held mine eyes may see?"

For lifted are they, and unwatched."

And he, -

"The lids stand open till the time arrive
When to the valley of Jehoshaphat
They each must wend, and earthly flesh resume,
And back returning, as the swarming hive,
From condemnation, each the doleful tomb
Re-enter wailing, and the lids thereat
Be bolted. Here in fitting torment lie
The Epicurean horde, who dared deny
That soul outlasts its mortal home. Is here
Their leader, and his followers round him. Soon
Shall all thy wish be granted, - and the boon
Ye hold in secret."

"Kind my guide," I said,

"I was not silent to conceal, but thou
Didst teach, when in thy written words I read,
That in brief speech is wisdom."

Here a voice

Behind me, "Tuscan, who canst walk at choice
Untouched amidst the torments, wilt thou stay?
For surely native of the noble land
Where once I held my too-audacious way,
Discreet of speech, thou comest."

The sudden cry

So close behind me from the chests that came,
First drove me closer to my guide, but he, -
"What dost thou? Turn thee!" - and a kindly hand
Impelled me, fearful, where the crawling flame
Was all around me, - "Lift thine eyes and see,
For there is Farinata. Be thou short
In speech, for time is failing."

Scorn of hell

Was in the eyes that met me. Hard he wrought
To raise himself, till girdle-deep I knew
The greatest of the fierce Uberti crew,
Who asked me, with contempt near-waiting, "Tell
Of whom thou art descended?"

I replied,

Concealing nothing. With lifted brows he eyed

My face in silence some brief while, and then, -
"Foes were they ever to my part, and me.
It yet must linger in the minds of men
How twice I broke them."

"Twice ye learned them flee,"

- I answered boldly, - "but they twice returned;
And others fled more late who have not learned
The mode of that returning."

Here a shade

Arose beside him, only to the chin
Revealed: I think it knelt. Beyond and round
It rather looked than at me. Nought it found.
Thereat it wept, and asked me, "Ye that go
Unhindered through these homes of gateless woe, -
Is my son with thee? Hast thou nought to tell?"

I answered, "Single through the gates of hell
I had no power to enter. Near my guide
Awaits me yonder. - Whom in foolish pride,
Thy Guido held so lightly."

At the word

He leapt erect from out the tomb, and cried,
"How saidst thou? *Held?* Already he hath not died?
Doth not the sweet light meet him? The clear air
Breathes he not yet?"

The imploring cries I heard

But checked awhile to answer, and in despair
He fell flat forward, and was seen no more.
But he, magnanimous, who first delayed
My steps, had heeded nought, nor turned his head,
And now continued that he spake before.
"If with the coin ye forged they have not paid,
It more torments me than this flaming bed.
Yet thou thyself, before the Queen of Night
Shall fifty times revoke and raise her light,
Shalt learn the hardship of that art. But tell,
As thou wouldst feel the cool winds' pinions beat
Once more upon thee, and the sweet light fall
Around the feet of morning, for this heat
And fetid air we writhe in, why were all

Those exiles pardoned by thy laws, to dwell
In their dear homes once more, and only mine,
My kindred, find no mercy?"

I to him, -

"The rout and chase that dyed the Arbia red
To thy descendants dealt this bitter bread;
The memory of that slaughter doth not dim,
But leaves thee to our prayers a name of hate
In all our churches."

Here he sighed, and said,

"I was not single in that strife, nor lacked
Good cause to strike; but when your remnant fled,
And Florence, naked to her foes elate,
Cowered, waiting, all with one consent agreed
To tread her out to dust, and extirpate
All life within her, I, and only I,
Stood out against it, and refused the deed,
And with my swords I saved them. Is this thing
Less memoried than my wrath?"

I answered, "Yea:

But what I can I will, and that thy seed
Have rest at my returning, solve, I pray,
A doubt that disconcerts me. Ye that dwell
In these abodes beneath us, each foretell
- Or so ye claim - what distant times shall bring,
Yet plead for knowledge of the passing day, -
Or mock me, asking that yourselves could say."

He answered, "As in age a man may see
Far off, while nearer sights are blurred, so we
See clearly times long passed, and times to be.
Foresight is ours, and long remembering,
In each an anguish, while the anxious mind
Is void to all around it, foiled and blind
Where most it longs for knowledge. Nought we know
Thine earthly present, save as here below
One after one descending bears his tale;
And therefore, when the wings of Time shall fail,
And sealed in these accursed tombs we lie,
All knowledge from our vacant minds shall die,

As well ye may perceive it."

Here I said,

Compunctious for a fault now seen, "Wilt tell
That other, fallen, that I did not well
Withholding answer? Guido is not dead.
My silence from the earlier doubt was bred,
From which thou hast resolved me."

Now my guide

Was calling, and in greater haste I said,
"Thy comrades in thy grief I charge thee tell,
Ere I go from thee."

Shortly he replied,

"The second Frederick, and the Cardinal,
Are with me, and a thousand more beside
Of whom I speak not."

With the word he fell;

And I went onward, turning in my thought
The hostile presage of his words that taught
Mine own near exile, till my guide at last
Questioned, "What cloud thine eyes hath overcast?
What thought hath wildered all thy mind?" and I
Answered, and told.

He said, "The things thou hear'st

That threat thee, hold them in thy memory well.
Yet know that soon, beneath a fairer sky,
When she, whose sight hath no blank space, shall tell
What cometh, then shalt thou read, ungapped and clear,
The journey of thy life."

The while he spake

He turned him leftward from the wall, to take
A path that to the midmost vale declined,
A fetid rising odour first to find.

Canto XI

BUT boldly outward from the wall we went,
Down sloping, till a sudden steep descent
Before us yawned. The sides, extending far,
Of broken rocks, a great pit circular

Enclosed. Beneath our feet a fouler throng
Than that we left, upcast a stench so vile
We might not face, but left our course awhile
To crouch behind a stone-built monument,
Whereon I read, "*Pope Anastasius*
Is here, who sold his faith for Photinus."

Then spake my Master. "Till the fetid air
By gradual use we take, we must not dare
Continue downward."

 "Show me, while we stay,
The meanings of this foul and dreadful way."

"I meant it, surely," said my guide. "Behold
The space beneath us. There three circlets lie,
Alike to those we left behind, but why
This deeper fate is theirs, I first will show;
And when we pass them in the depths below
Ye need not wait to question what ye see.

"All malice of men's hearts in injury
Results, and hence to Heaven is odious;
And all the malice that aggrieveth thus
Strikes in two ways, by either force or fraud;
And fraud in man is vice peculiar,
That from Hell's centre to the utmost star
Is else unknown, and is to God therefore
Most hateful Hence the violent-sinful lie
Outward, and inmost are the fraudulent.
And as the sinful-violent make their war
On God, their neighbours, or themselves, so they
Are portioned in the outer wards.

 I say,
To them, or to the things they own, the wrong
May aim. By violence, wounds or death may be,
Extortions, burnings, wastes; and ye shall see
That equal in the outmost round belong
Reivers of life alike, and plunderers.
And in the second round are those whose sin
Is violence to themselves; they weep therein,

Repenting when too late, whose hands destroy
Their earthly bodies; and condemned alike
Are those with profligate wasteful hands who strike
At their own wealth, or having cause for joy
Reject it, weeping with no need. The third
And smallest of the outer circlets holds
All those with violence of blaspheming words,
Or in their hearts, the Lord of Life deny,
The wealth of Nature that the world enfolds
Contemning. Hence by lust or usury,
Sodom or Cahors, the downward path may be
That ends in this destruction.

Fraud, that gnaws

The universal conscience of mankind,
Is also different in its guilt, because
It either at the stranger strikes behind,
Or makes the sacred bond of confidence
The means of its prevailing; and the first
Breaks but the kindly general bond, and hence
More outward in the final depths are cast
Deceivers, flatterers, cheats, and sorcerers,
Thieves, panders, and such filth.

The last and worst

And smallest circle holds such souls as break
Not only in their guilt the natural bond
That all men own, but in some trust, beyond
The usual course, are faithless. In this lake,
The base and centre of Dis, the inmost hell,
All traitors in relentless torments dwell."

I answered, "Master, clearer words than these
I could not ask, the ranks of guilt to show,
That gather in the dreadful gulfs below;
But tell me, - those that in so great dis-ease
We earlier passed, wind-beaten, choked with slime,
Or chilled and flattened with unending rain,
If God's wrath reach them, why they yet remain
Outside the hot walls of the Place of Pain?
Or why they suffer through the night of Time
So greatly, if they are not judged to Hell?"

He answered, "Surely ye recall not well
The Ethics that your schools have taught, or wide
Your thoughts have wandered from their wont, to cause
A doubt so simple. Are there not three laws
By which the ways of Hell from Heaven divide -
Beast-treason, malice, and incontinence,
And of these three the third the least offence
To God provoketh, and receives less blame?
Bethink the faults of those where first ye came
Through circles loftier than the heated wall
That now surrounds us, and ye well shall see
Why with less wrath the strokes of justice fall
On those left outward by divine decree."

"O Light!" I said, "whose cheering rays dispel
The mists that blind me, wilt thou further tell
Why stands the custom'd toll of usury
Condemned in thy discourse as direst sin,
Abhorrent to the bounty of God?"

He said,

"The teaching of thine own Philosophy
Is pregnant with this truth unborn. Therein
Thou learn'st of God himself, interpreted
In Nature's ways; and as a child may tread
Unsurely in its Master's steps, thine art
Interprets Nature in its turn, and is
God's grandchild therefore. Through these mysteries
Look backward. When the Law of Eden came,
How spake the Eternal Wisdom? *Toil; It said,
And in that labour find thy guerdon-bread:
Be fruitful, and increase thy kind.* His part
God gave to man, so saying. The usurer
Seeks not his profit in the path designed,
But looks the fruit of others' toils to find,
And pluck where nought he planted.

More to say

The time permits not; but the downward way
We needs must venture. In the outer skies
The Fishes from the pale horizon rise,

And the Great Wain its shining course descends
Where the night-lair of Caurus dark extends."

Canto XII

NOW came we to the steep cliff-side. As where
The Adige at the mountain bored until
Fell the huge ruin of half its bulk, and there
Turned the swift stream a further course to fill
Beneath the scarred precipitous side, so here
The shattered ominous cliffs descended sheer;
And sprawled across the verge, Crete's infamy,
The fruit of that false cow, Pasiphaë,
Was fearsome, that the boldest heart should flee.

To us he turned his red malignant eyes,
Gnawing his own side, the while he strove to rise,
As one made rageful past restraint, but loud
My leader hailed him, "Think'st thou, overproud,
That Theseus cometh, who gave thy death
Not one that Ariadne taught is here,
Nor destined victim for thy rage to gore,
But one who walketh through the place of fear
In safety, to behold the stripes ye bore."
As some roped bull, whose throat is stretched to feel
The knife's sharp doom, against the rending steel
So madly wrenches that he breaks away,
Already slaughtered, plunging while he may,
But blindly and vainly, at this word I saw
Heaving the huge bulk of the Minotaur,
And cried my careful guide, "Descend with speed,
The whilst he rages."

Down with watchful heed,
But swiftly, clomb we by the rocks' rough side,
The jutting stones that lightly held my guide
Trembling beneath my earthlier weight.

He said,
Who watched my silence, "Likely turns thy thought
To this rent ruin the gross beast guards. Before,

When downward came I, of this fall was nought,
But nearly after came that Lord who bore
Out from the horror of Dis its choicer prey.
Hell, to its loathliest entrails, felt that day
Love's coming, and trembled, and this mountain fell.
The power of Love, that thus discomfits Hell,
Oft in forgotten times, as sages tell,
Hath changed our world to chaos. - But heed thy way.
Before us is the gulf of blood wherein
Murderers by violence purge their briefer sin.
O blindness of their greed, or bestial rage!
So short the war that on their kind they wage;
So long is their repenting."

I beheld

A wide moat, curving either hand, as though
Its sweep surrounded all the plain. Below
On the near bank, were Centaurs, each who held
A spear for casting, or a bended bow,
The while they raced along the brink, as when
Their game they hunted in the world of men.

Seeing us, they stayed, and of the nearest, three
Approached us, with the threats of shaft on string.
One cried, "What torments do your guilts decree,
Who cross Hell's gaps in such strange wandering?
How came ye loosened from your dooming? - Say,
Lest the cord teach ye."

Unperturbed, my guide

Gave answer. "Not for such vain threats we stay.
To Chiron only will we speak. Thy will
For rashness cost thee once thy life, and still
Inciteth folly." And then to me, "Behold
Nessus, who once for Deianira died;
Beyond is Chiron, round whose mighty knees
Played once the infant years of Achilles;
The rageful Pholus is the last; they go
With thousand others around the moat, that so
If any spirits the boiling blood would quit
Beyond the licence of their dooms, they know
A different anguish from the shafts that slit

The parts shown naked."

These swift beasts and we
Approached each other the while he spake, and he,
Great Chiron, with a shaft's notched end put back
The beard that hindered both his jaws, and said,
To those his comrades, "Not as walk the dead
Doth this one coming, but with the weight they lack
Disturbs the stones he treadeth."

My guide by now
Stood where the human and the brute combined,
Beneath his breast, and answered for me. "Yea,
He lives indeed, and I, to lead his way,
I race this dark valley. No sportive choice to find,
But driven of need, he threads this night of flame;
And She from singing Alleluias came
Who bade me do it. No spirit condemned am I,
Nor he deserving of thy doom. I pray,
By virtue of the Name I will not say,
I hat of thy comrades one thy care supply
To guide us to the ford, and him to bear
Across, who may not tread the yielding air
As those discarnate."

Chiron's bearded head
Bent round to Nessus at his right, and said,
"Turn, as they ask, and guide, and bear him through,
And warn thy comrades that no wrong they do
To these in passing."

In this trusty ward
We held the margin of the purple flood
That seethed beneath us. In the boiling blood
Were spirits to the brows immersed.

"Ye see,"

Said Nessus, "tyrants who by weight of sword
Spread death and rapine in their lands. Is here
Fierce Dionysius, who the doleful year
Made long to those he ruled in Sicily;
And Alexander here repents; and he
Whose brows o'erhung with night-black hair ye see
Is Azzolino; and the head beyond
Where on the stream the trailing mane is blonde,

Obizzo, whom his stepson choked."

We came

Where other spirits in the boiling pond
Showed from the neck, and in this place beheld
That Guy who to avenge his father's name
The English Henry at Viterbo felled,
Even in the presence of God. The victim's heart
Yet raised in reverence on the bank of Thame,
Recalls it, and the assassin boils apart
Placed separate for the deed's high blasphemy.

And further passed we those whose guilt allowed
Of freedom to the waist. Among the crowd,
More numerous now, were more in clearer view,
That by themselves or by their deeds I knew,
As shallower yet the seething purple grew,
Till all except the miscreants' feet was free.

"Here must we cross the fosse," the Centaur said,
And I, sole living in this world of dead,
Climbed upward, and my earthly weight he bore,
And while he waded to the further shore
Continued, "As the boiling stream ye see
Diminish, so its bottom sinks anew
Rounding the circle, till it comes once more
To those whose ruling choked their world in gore,
In which they suffer. High Justice here torments
The pirate Sextus, and fierce Pyrrhus here;
Attila with eternal tears laments;
And Rinier Pazzo, once a word of fear,
With Rinier of Corneto boils, to pay
For bandit-murders on the State's highway."

Canto XIII

WHILE Nessus yet recrossed the purple stream
A wood we entered where no path appeared,
No cool wind stirred, nor any sun came through,
But all the foliage, as by winter seared,

Was brittle and brown, and gnarled and twisted grew
The branches, and if any fruit did seem
They were but poisonous pods to closer view.
No denser holts the lurking beasts have found
Beneath Corneto, where the marshy ground,
Uncoultured, to Cecina's stream declines.

Foul harpies nest amidst the loathly vines,
Who chased the Trojans from the Strophades,
With their drear wail of some awaiting woe.
Their wings are wide: and like gross birds below
Their bellies feathered, and their feet are clawed.
Strange cries come from them through the sickly trees.

My Master told me, "Through this dismal land,
The second circlet pass we, till we reach
The place of that intolerable sand
Which forms the third, and in its place completes
The outer round. Recall my earlier speech
That taught the order of these woes. Look well
For confirmation of the things I tell "

I looked, but saw not. Every side there rose
A wailing burdened with unnumbered woes,
While all the woods were vacant. From ground
It came not - rather from the boughs around
It beat upon us, as voiced by those who hid
Before our coming, the tangled growth amid.

My Master taught me. "If thou break away
The nearest twig that meets thine hand, wilt see
How far thy dreaming from the truth astray."

Thereat I reached, and from a twisted thorn
That rose before us, withered, gaunt, forlorn,
Broke short a twig, and from the trunk a cry
Came sharply, "Tear not!" and a blood-gout
Dark on the wound, the while the trunk anew
Entreated, "Rend not; does no mercy lie
In those that still their human forms retain?"

Men were we, till we left on earth self-slain
The bodies given of God. But had we been
The souls of serpents, in this hopeless dole
We had not thought that any mortal soul
Would wound us, helpless to their hands."

Hast seen

Cast on the coals a living branch and green?
One end already burns, and one projects
Clear of the heat, but from the fire's effects
Moisture exudes and hissing wind. So here
Blood welled and words from out the wound. The fear
Of this strange voice, and pity, so in me wrought
I dropt the broken shoot, and fixed in thought
Stood silent.

On my side my leader spake,
"O wounded spirit, had his heart believed
The truth that earlier in my verse he read,
He had not with unthinking violence grieved
The most unhappy of the hapless dead.
But mine the word that caused his hand to break,
Who knew that truth's incredibility
Would else confound him. It was grief to me
To prompt him to it. But if thou speak and tell
Of whom thou wast, he may requite thee well,
Thy fame renewing in the world, for there
He soon returneth."

And the voice replied,

"The sound of thy seducing words and fair
Constrains me to forgive thee, and confide
The bitter grief that in my trunk I hide,
Which else were silent always. With me bear
In patience somewhat, if I talk too long,
Caught in this bait of words, when all my wrong
Returneth to me. In this toil is he,
The second Frederick's confident, who held
His heart's two keys, and turned them. Here ye see
The ruin of too great fidelity,
That sleep and life gave forfeit. Yea, for she,
That harlot who in Cæsar's court rebelled
Against all virtue round his throne, the bane

And vice of all high concourse, Envy, stirred
And slandered, till my Master half believed.
And I, who all things at his hands received,
And all myself had rendered, in disdain
Gave silence only to the accusing word,
And in contempt of life I broke the chain
That held me to it. Just to others, I wrought
Injustice to myself. But here I swear,
By these sad roots that hold me, word nor thought,
Nor deed nor negligence was mine in aught
Against him faithless. Ye that upward bear
The news and burden of our griefs below,
Rebuild my memory in the world, I pray,
That my rash hand prostrated."

Here his woe

Found silence, and the things I sought to say
I lacked the heart. Until, at last, my guide
Enquired me, "Wouldst thou more?" and I replied,
"Ask for me."

To the prisoned grief he said,
"That this man gladly when he leave the dead
Uplift thy record, as thy words entreat,
Inform us further how this fate ye meet,
How the bent soul these twisted knots allows;
Or ever any from these tortured boughs
Erect himself to manhood."

Then the tree

Blew strongly, and the wind was words that said,
"In brief thou shalt be answered. When the dead,
Self-slaughtered, from the unready corse is torn,
Then Minos, in the seventh gulf to mourn,
Consigns it. Here on no set space it falls,
But cast at random, and its roots it strikes
In marsh or rock, and boughs and thorny spikes
Grow upward. On its leaves the harpies feed,
Tearing, and where the broken twiglets bleed
Pain finds its outlet.

When the trumpet calls,
We all, with those who earthly flesh regain,
Shall upward troop, but that our hand hath slain

We may not enter, as is just. The Vale
Of Judgment when we leave we each shall hale
Our bodies slain behind us, till we reach
The dismal thorns we left, and each on each
Shall hang them. Every trunk of every shade
Bent with the weight of that itself betrayed."

We still were listening, lest more words should come
From this sad spirit, when rose such noise anear
That all the wailings of the woods were dumb
Before it, and we paused, as those who hear
The boar-hunt plunging through the brake, and nigh,
Crashed boughs, and rush of beasts that chase and fly,
Approaching where they stand; and forth there burst
Two spirits torn and bare, and cried the first,
"Befriend me, Death!" and cried the one behind,
"Ah, Lano, swifter legs than mine ye show,
But Toppo's tourney found thy limbs more slow."

Thereat he made no further pace, but low
Crawled 'neath the densest bush the woods contained,
And the next instant, as the shade he gained,
A rush of hell-hounds on his chase there came.
Wild on the bush they leapt to trace and claim
Their hiding victim, sinking fang and claw
In him who squatted in its midst. They rent
The writhing limbs, and diverse ways they went,
Carrying the fragments that they tore.

My guide

Now led my steps the damaged bush beside,
That loud lamented. Severed boughs we saw,
And torn twigs bleeding. In its pain it made
Protest, "Jacopo da Sant' Andrea!
What gain was here to make my leaves thy shade?
What condemnation for thy sins is mine?"

My Master questioned it, "Who art thou, say,
So bruised and injured in a strife not thine?"

It answered, "Ye that some strange fate hath led

To see me mangled and discomfited,
I pray ye closely round my foot to lay
The boughs and leaves their violence strawed away.
In that fair city of the plain I dwelt
Which once to Mars, its earliest patron, knelt,
And then the Baptist in his place preferred,
And earned thereby the war-god's enmity.
So that, except on Arno's bridge there stands
His statue yet, those men with useless hands
Had toiled, from ashes of the Huns, again
To build it in the years of Charlemagne.

"I have no name: I have no tale to say.
I made a gibbet of my house. Ye see
The end in this, the doleful price I pay."

Canto XIV

LOVE in my heart for that dear home of mine
Compelled me. To the nameless Florentine
I did the service that he asked. I laid
The gathered twigs against his trunk.

We left

That grove of men, of human form bereft
By their own violence, and before us lay
A space so hateful that I shrank afraid,
For surely none might cross it.

Here, I say,

The third sad circlet wide before us spread,
A desert, by the dark wood garlanded,
As that is belted by the boiling fosse.
A desert which the hardiest might not cross
Was here. The Libyan waste where Cato led
The remnant of the host of Pompey, shows
Dry sand alike, but oh, what heavier woes,
Vengeance of God! what woes were here! Who boast
They fear not Heaven, before that dreadful coast
Have come not, or they would not doubt their dread!
Strewn on the sands the naked souls I saw

Lamenting loudly. Some by diverse law
Lay flat: some crouched: some madly raced, and these,
More numerous far, by milder cries conveyed
A lesser torment than the souls that stayed
Fixed on one spot.

Upon that concourse dire
Slow flakes were falling of dilated fire,
Straight downward, as the Alpine snows descend,
When no wind stirs the stillness.

As there came
From burning skies the separate flakes of flame
Upon the host that Alexander led
Across the torrid Indian plains - and they
Stamped the red ashes lest they join and spread,
And all be conflagration - so the heat
Flaked downward in a slow unceasing sheet,
On sand re-kindled with recruited fire,
Like tinder that the flint and steel ignite.
Here was the dance of woven hands I in vain
That brushed aside the settling points of pain.

I said, "O thou, whom all these different hells
Obey - save those gate-demons obdurate -
Who yonder lies, whose fierce disdain repels
The eternal doom, and with a heart as great
As all his ruin, beneath the torturing rain
Contorted, moves not, nor laments?"

My guide

I questioned, but the rebel shade replied,
"Dead am I, but yet my living heart unslain
Outequals Heaven. Though this relentless rain
Fall ever; though Jove the toiling knave should tire
From whom he snatched the bolt of previous fire
That first transfixed me; though he tire alike
All Etna's smiths, there is no power to strike
Shall make me quail. Let all His force employ,
He shall not taste the fierce exultant joy
To break me, suppliant."

I had yet to learn

My guide's hard voice, that in slow words and stern

Made answer. "Think'st thou then, O Capaneus,
Thy wrath makes answer to the wrath of Zeus?
Or God regards it? But thy rageful pride,
Against thee with the outer fires allied,
Makes heavier torment for thy bane, and so
Is penal only to thyself - Behold,"

- With gentler voice again assumed, my guide
Turned to me, as the sinner's tale he told -
"That lord, who once with six like kings was foe
To Thebes, and sieged it. Then his boast, as now,
That God he equalled. But his words avow
The justice of his doom, and impotent
Against regardless Heaven, they ornament
His breast most fitly - Follow where I tread -
- Avoid the sand."

With careful steps he led
Along the margin of the mournful wood,
And spake no more, until at length we stood
Where-a thin river of most doleful red
(I shudder, thinking), from the sighing trees
Flowed outward. As the stream the harlots share
Flows outward from beneath Bulicame,
So this ran forward through the sand. Stone-bare
Its bottom, stone its shelving sides, and grey
The stony margins of its course. By these
I judged that here we crossed the fiery plain
Which else repelled us - But my guide again
Was speaking.

"Since the doleful gate ye passed,
Which still for all creation, first and last,
Stands wide, no sights of wonder seen compare
With this slight stream, whose margins cold and bare
No fires can vanquish, whose red waters quench
Hell's heat, and burn not."

"Master," I desired,
"For hunger wakened, grant the food required."

"Far out in ocean lies an island waste
Whose King, when once the early world was chaste,
Ruled all men. In the midst a mountain lies,

"Surely, in this scarlet tide
The one flows past ye. But at Lethe's side
Thy feet shall stand in other air than this,
For Lethe flows not through the lost abyss,
But those repentant, from their guilt made free,
Shall find it. - Follow boldly where I tread
The stone. Not here the burning sand can spread;
Nor the red rain molest from overhead."

Canto XV

WE held the margin of the scarlet stream,
The cold grey stones beneath our feet. A steam
Arising from the water, overhead
A canopy that roofed the causeway spread,
Which quenched the fire descending.

As the dyke

From Bruges to Cadsand, where the burghers dread
The arising tide, or as the bank alike
The Paduans build in winter, to forbear
The Brenta's floods, when Chiarentana knows
The feet of summer on the mountain snows,
Such were the bulwarks of the stream, though less
In height and thickness.

Far that wilderness

Of wailing boughs we left, till backward glance
Had failed to find it. Once a troop we met
That racing past us in their mournful dance
Reversed, and sharply were their glances set
To read us, as a tailor frowns to thread
The needle, when long years of toil have
The needed sight, or as men meeting peer
At twilight, when the rising moon is thin.

Of these, one caught me by the skirt, and said,
"O marvel!" and the face that heat had skimmed,
I yet recalled, and answered, "Art thou here,
My master?"

He replied, "Brief words to win,

I pray thee, O my son, consent that I
Go backward somewhat with thee, while my kin
Continue on the path we held."

I said,

"I do not grant it, but beseech: and more,
For those old days, when all thy learning's store
Was mine to pillage, if my guide permit,
Sit will I with thee here some space."

But he

Made answer, "Nay, for if we pause or sit,
There must we for a hundred years remain,
Powerless to writhe beneath the falling rain.
But I will walk beside thy skirts as now,
No farther than these penal laws allow,
And then my station in our band resume,
Who race, and wail our everlasting doom."

I dared not from my higher stand descend,
Nor might he to the causeway climb, and so
I walked as those in humble prayer who bend,
The while he paced the burning sand below.

He first enquired, "What chance or fate hath led
Thy feet, before thy mortal loss, to tread
A path so vacant?"

"In mid-life," I said,

"I wandered in a pathless waste, and there,
Refused of exit, in my last despair,
I was returning to its midst, when he
Who guides me came, and by this dreadful way
Will bring me home at last."

And he to me,

"I doubt it nought, for if thy destined star
Perceived I rightly, when fair life and clear
I with thee breathed, a different haven lay
Before thee than this heat to which we steer,
Who tempt High Heaven in all we speak and are.
And but for death's too soon determining,
Mine aid had cheered thee in thy later spring.

"But those, the thankless and malign, who came
To Florence from the rocks of Fiesole,
Who mixed not with a nobler race than they,
Still in their children hate thee, deed and name.
Where the sour sorb-trees fruit, shall figs abound?
Like are they even as our fathers found.
Greed envy, hauteur, are the signs they show.
Look that thou walk not in their ways. For though
The path be stony for thy feet today,
The time is near when in thy larger fame
Both parties for thy potent aid shall pray.
Then from the he-goat's teeth the grass be far!
But those thy kind, if any yet there be
Surviving of the sacred Roman seed,
Amidst the dense growth of the ranker weed,
Let the Fiesolan beasts, the where they lie,
Make their own litter for their natural sty."

I answered, "Master, had it lain with me
To choose my boon from Heaven, not where we are,
But in the clear air of the world above,
Thy words had guided. All my heart in love
Returns toward thee, as my thoughts recall
Thine image, patient, kind, beneficent,
That taught me, tireless, hour by hour, in all,
How by the growth of that which Heaven hath lent,
Man wins to life immortal. While I live,
In nought but words - and grateful words I give-
Is still my power to thank thee. All you tell,
Mind-treasured, with a text remembered well,
I keep for One on whom I hope, that she
May comment further, as shall surely be
If her I reach hereafter. This I say
Meantime, let Fortune at her worst of will,
So conscience chide not, wreck my days: and still
The boor his mattock's baser laws obey."

My leader heard me, and a backward glance
Across his shoulder, to the right, he cast,
To where we talked, and answered, "What ye say,

Forget not in the days undawned."

But yet

I questioned Ser Brunetto, "Tell me they
Most famed on earth, who pay the godless debt
In torment of this fiery rain at last?"

He answered, "Some there be ye well may know,
But more that better should the world forget,
And time for speech is shortened. Briefly, here
Are clerks and scholars, all betrayed so low
By one defiling. Priscian here must run.
And of our city here Accorso's son,
Francesco. If such scurf thy mind admits,
That base one of the Arno howling sits,
Who, to Bacchiglione's bank transferred,
There left his sin-wrecked nerves. - But further word
I may not. - Yonder in the distance see
New smoke arising from the sandy waste.
Fresh folk race on with whom I must not be. -
Those writings mine by which on earth I live
Remember. - More I ask not."

Here in haste

He loosed my skirts, and turned, and seemed as they
Who at Verona's summer sports compete,
Naked, across the fields with flying feet,
To win the vesture green their speed to pay.

Canto XVI

THE sandy plain was almost past. There rose
Such noise as murmurs through the hive. For near
We came to where the tainted water sheer
Falls to the level of the fraudulent,
The next sad circle. Ever past us went
The flying bands beneath the fiery rain,
Scattering the sharp tormenting flakes. Of those,
Three runners from a troop dividing came,
Who called me with one impulse, "Stranger, stay,

Who by the garb hast found this dreadful way
From our perverted city."

The searing flame
Had baked their limbs, and in the hardened flesh
New wounds were formed with every flake. Ah me
Again in thought the piteous sight I see,
And make their anguish mine. My guide the while
Turned as they ran. "Wait here. For courtesy
Deserve they from thyself, than theirs to thee
More urgent. Only that the falling heat
Forbids, thyself with greater haste should meet
Their coming, than their own."

At that we paused,
And when they saw it their arresting cry
They ceased, and recommenced the general wail.

I might not reach them through the burning hail,
Nor might they to the causeway climb, nor run
Beside me, for the end was now so nigh,
Nor might they, lest more grief the torture caused,
Remain unmotioned in one place, and so
They circled, as the nude, oiled champions go,
Rotating, for the chance of grasp or blow
Watchful, but these their eyes so held on me,
That feet and neck perforce moved contrary,
As round they wheeled.

One hailed me first, "O thou,
Whose living feet, as some strange powers allow,
Resound among the shadows, if aught so base
As we who bake in this unfertile place
Thy mind regard, recall our earthly fame,
And heed our plea to learn thy later name.
He in whose footsteps I rotate, though now
So peeled and bare, when in clear light, was he,
Gualdrada's grandson, who so nobly wrought
In field and counsel both; the one ye see
Who treads the sand behind, in all men's thought
Should still be fragrant, Aldobrandi he;
And I, Jacopo Rusticucci. She,
That savage wife an ill fate gave, has brought

This misery on me."

Had some shelter shown
To guard me from the slow unceasing rain,
I had not shrunk to cross the heated plain,
To greet them in their grief, whose names are known
So highly, nor I think my Master's voice
Had chid me; but their aspects, baked and dried,
Repelled and warned me.

"Not contempt," I cried,
"But sorrow in my heart since first my guide
Prepared me to expect such names, has grown,
And will not leave me soon. Alike we own
The same fair city, where your deeds today
Are told not seldom, and true men rejoice
Who hear them. From the bitter gall I go
The fruit to find, and yet descend more low
To Hell's deep centre ere I climb."

He said,
"Thy spirit long within thy members dwell,
And fame behind thee shine! But speak I pray
If valour quite and noble grace have fled
From our loved city. For one, whose place in Hell
Was filled but late, - with yonder troop he burns,
Torments us largelier than the pain he learns,
With tales of its befalling. Is there now
Such dearth of honour, lifted once so high?"
And my heart failed me for direct reply,
But with uplifted face I cried, "O thou,
My Florence! Not thy fallen tears are dry
For plebeian strangers in thy halls, and pride
And riot extolled, and honour crucified."

And these that heard, their glances from me drew,
And at each other gazed, as men that knew
My confirmation, and divined it true.

At length they answered in one voice, "If there,
As here, the truth unharmed thy lips may dare,
Blest art thou! If from this unlighted air
Again ye climb to where the stars are bare,

When with rejoicing heart *I once was there*
Thy thought looks backward, let thy words to men
Exalt our names for that which late we were."

At this they broke their giddy wheel, and then
More swiftly than the heart could breathe Amen
With legs like wings, across the sand they fled,
And we went forward once again.

So near

The sound of waters now, I scarce could hear
My leader's voice. As that first stream to head
From Monte Viso's height a separate way
Seaward, its quieter name and loftier bed
Forgets at Forli, and in sheer descent
Above San Benedetto's towers resounds
(There where a thousand in its wealthy bounds
Might refuge, hindered by the sheltered few),
So here the red stream to the nether pit
Fell headlong, echoing through the void.

I wore

A cord girt round me (once I thought to snare
That painted pard of which I spoke before,
So noosed), and this my guide commanded me
To loose, and reached it from me coiled, and there
Far outward flung it in the blank abyss.

The blackness gulped it, while I thought, "From this,
An act so strange, must spring new mystery, -
How fixed he gazes where it sank, - and he,
As though he heard me, answered. Ah, what care,
What caution should we yield to Those who see
Not the deed only, but the thought!

He said,

"I signalled That which rises while I speak,
And makes thy question clear."

A man may dread

Truth more than falsehood to his friends to speak,
When truth than falsehood shows more wild, and weak
Of proof is that he inly knows, but I
Am barred from silence. Reader, truth I swear,

By all my hope of fame this work shall bear,
That slowly through the gross and fetid air
A Shape swam upward. As the mariners see
Their comrade rising from the depths, who dived
An anchor tangled in the rocks to free,
Against the brink the wingless bulk arrived.

Canto XVII

BEHOLD the reptile with the stinging tail,
That mountains hold not, nor strong walls avail
To bar, nor any weapons wound. Behold
Him who diseases all the world with guile."

So spake my guide, and to the monster signed
To join us where the causeway ceased, and he,
That shape of loathsome fraud, swam warily
Landward, and rested there his bust, the while
The undulations of his tail unrolled
Trailed outward in the hollow dark behind.

His face was human, with a glance benign,
Kindly, and just, and mild, but all beside
Was reptile to the venom'd fork. Two paws
Were hairy to the armpits. Bright design
And various colour patterned all his hide
On breast and flank, in knots and circles drawn;
Splendid as brodered cloths that mock the dawn,
From Smyrna, or the looms of Tartary,
Or those Arachne wove.

As oft we see

The wherries half afloat and half ashore,
Or as the German beaver waits his prey,
So on the brink the unclean monster lay,
Which brims the desert with containing stone;
The bust reposing, and the tail alone
Still twisting, restless in the void: it bore
A forked end, venom'd as the scorpions are.

Then spake my guide, "Along the dreadful beach
Now must we for a little space, to reach
This shape malignant where it rests." We went
Down from the causeway on the right, and then
Ten steps across the stony marge, that so
Clear of the sand and fire our path should go
Along the skirting of the void, and when
We reached the monster, near at hand I knew
Along the edge of sand and stone, a row
Of sinners crouching.

Here my Master said,
"All kinds who suffer in this round to view,
Before we leave it, mark their mien who sit
Around the margin of the deeper pit.
Go forward to them, but be brief. The while
Converse I shortly with this beast of guile,
That his broad shoulders bear us down."

Thereat
Approached I to the doleful folk who sat
Thus on the torture's utmost bound. Their woe
Was streaming from their eyes Above, below,
With restless movements, like the dog that lies
In summer, sleepless from the teasing flies,
And turns, now here, now there, with snout and paw
Smiting, so they with ceaseless hands and vain
Brushed the hot sand, or flicked the burning rain.

From face to face I looked, but nought I saw
Familiar, only that a purse there hung
From every neck, of various prints, and each,
The while they baked along the dismal beach,
Gazed down, as though his sure salvation lay
The emblazoned pouch within.

The shades among,
One gilded pouch an azure lion bore,
And one of gules a white goose showed, but more,
I paused at one who on a silver ground
A pregnant sow gave azure, and thereon
He looked, and growled, "What dost thou? Get thee gone.
Thou art not of us. But since thy live return

My word may carry, let the Paduans learn
The place at my left side, that's vacant now,
Awaits Vitaliano." Like a cow
He writhed his mouth, and licked his nose, and said,
"Of Padua I; but these are Florentines
Around me. Oft they din my ears and cry,
*We wait the sovereign cavalier, who shines
In silver. He shall bear the he goats red
Upon the pouch that decks his throat.*"

But I

Would wait no longer, lest my guide were wroth,
And left these dolorous souls, pain-wearied now,
Beneath their burden of eternity,
While backward to the beast I went.

His haunch

My guide had climbed, and now to venture forth
He called me likewise. "Here I mount, that thou
Shalt ride before me; so the swinging tail,
More distant from thy fears, when out we launch,
Shall steer us downward. Here no steadier stair
Avails, but through the empty dark we sail.
Be bold, and fear not. For the fetid air
Shall bear us safely."

As the man that fears

The nearing ague, pale and shivering stands,
Already gazing on a bloodless nail,
Not strengthful even to leave the harmful shade,
Was I that heard. But yet with trembling hands
(As some poor knave his craven heart conceals,
Emboldened by his master's calm), I made
My passage to the shoulders broad. I tried
For words in which to beg my gentle guide
To lend his arm, but no sound came, and he,
Who knew my thoughts, and aided all, thereon
Reached round me while he ordered, - "Geryon,
Now start, and widely be thy circles spread,
And slow thy sinking." As the wherries slide
Downward and backward to the waiting tide,
So slid the monster from the bank, until,
Launched in free space, he outward turned his head

To face the void, and like an eel his tail
Was twisting, and his paws outreached to fill
With gathered air.

Did greater fears assail
When Phaëthon let the loose reins fall, that they
Were trailed through heaven, and burnt the Milky Way?
Or when Icarus felt the wax divide
From feathered loins, the while his father cried,
Far under, *Evil road is thine?* No sight
Was left me, save the beast I rode. The night
Was hollow where he swam. I might not know
That sank we, saving that the wind below
Beat upward, and against my face it blew
As round we wheeled in gradual loops. I knew,
Right-hand, the thunder of the whirlpool rise,
And outward stretched my head, with downward eyes,
And then shrank backward in more fear, for high
Through the gross darkness pierced a wailing cry,
And flickering lights were far beneath, whereby
I learnt our height, and by these sights aware
Of how we wheeled, and in what space of air,
And how descending, colder fear I knew.

But as the falcon, soaring long in vain,
Wing-wearied, stoops to reach the empty plain,
Though neither bird nor lure attract, the while
The falconer cries Alas I and winging slow
Disdainful, sullen, not for bait or guile
Is lured, but from his master sulks, - below
The ragged rocks at last, this Geryon,
By us defeated of his customed freight,
Alit, but lightened of my earthly weight
Like arrow from the loosened string was gone.

Canto XVIII

Now stood we in the utter depth of Hell,
For here ten trenches, with a central well,
Contain all traitors in their kinds. The wall

Is iron-grey stone that rings it round, and all
Its floors and bastions are alike. Its name
Is Malebolge. In this central shame
There lie ten moats that like a tenfold chain
Circle the wide and deep and dreadful well
That midmost sinks, - but in its place I tell
That horror.

As succeeding moats begird
A fortress, so, between the outer wall
And central shaft, the ten great chasms extend
In which the sin-divided traitors herd,
And as such moats are bridged, so cliffs remain
Connecting bank to bank, converging all
Where, at the margin of the pit, they end.

By the first fosse we stood, when Geryon shook
His back in anger from my weight, and shot
Upward again for his familiar prey.
My guide, left-hand, beneath the rampart took
narrow path the ditch that edged, to find
The nearest crossing. In his steps behind
I walked, nor spared upon my right to look
Down on the crowd that filled the trench. Their lot
Revealed new torments, and new griefs, for they
Had live tormentors for their bane, unlike
The circles past.

Beneath the demons' ban
All-naked here in two great crowds they ran,
In opposite ways. For close beneath the dyke
The advancing concourse faced us all, but those
Lined in the further rank beside us moved,
Though livelier-motioned.

As at Rome were seen
The pilgrims in the year of Jubilee
Divided on the bridge, - one crowd was sent
Toward St. Peter's, one reversed that went
Toward Giordano, - so these shades I see
Herded. Behind them demons, horned and hooved,
With swinging scourges move. Their backs are grooved
And wheeled with beating where the thongs have been.

Ah, how the first cut lifts their legs! Not one
That waits a second stroke to make him run.

As on we passed, a sinner stayed mine eye
Whose face familiar seemed. With bended head
He shunned my gaze, but to my guide I said,
"One was there in the troop that passed us by
Already that my sight had known." Thereat
He paused not only, but in courtesy
Some steps allowed me to return, that I
Might question whom I sought; and when we found
That hiding shade I cried aloud, "O thou!
In vain that wouldst, with careful glance on ground,
Avoid, except that features feigned ye wear,
I know ye, Venedico. What curst prank
Hath cast thee pickling in so foul a tank?"

He answered, sullen, "Nought I seek to tell,
But thy clear speech, that through the murk of Hell,
With recollection of the former air,
Resounds so strangely, all compels. I run
For no gained greed or spoil my lust had won.
Persuasions only brought my bane. I weep
That fair Ghisola shared the Marquis' sleep
By my contriving. That the truth, whate'er
The aspect that a viler tale may wear
In lips of gossip. Tell the Bolognese
It is not only I that run with these
From our false city. They crowd more numerous
Than all the infant tongues on earth today
That *Sipa* in their speech are taught to say,
Between the Reno and the Savena.
If witness wouldst thou seek, recall of us
Our avarice, that thyself hast known." But here
A chasing demon smote his haunch. "Away,
Pander! no women here are coin." He leapt
Wildly, and raced, and I returned, and kept
Behind mine escort.

In few steps a ridge
We reached, that jutted from the wall. A bridge

It made, outhollowed where the crowd below
Went through it. Here we inward turned and left
Forever all the loftier woes, wherein
They weep who wrought direct inferior sin;
And on the centre of the span my guide
Paused, in his thought for my desire, to show
Those shades who late, because they raced beside,
And did not meet us, might have passed unseen.

This train we faced, and watched the scourges plied
As hard as on the nearer side had been.
But one there came who shed no tears for pain,
And spake my guide, "Behold, his looks retain
Their regal right, as when his craft bereft
The Colchians of the ram; or passed his way
By Lemnos, where the women merciless
Their males had slain. The young Hypsipyle
(Who for her father's life had all misled)
In turn he cheated. Words of meaning fair,
And marriage gifts he gave, and left her there

Alone and pregnant. For that guilt to pay
He runs, and Medea weights his doom. All they
Whose hidden lives the like deceit confess
In this direction race. But longer stay
Deserves not. Pass we to the further trench."

The narrow path ran on, and somewhat sank,
But arching where it bridged the chasms.

A stench

Assailed us as we neared the next, beyond
The vapour cast from any stagnant pond
Of earth's excretions, scent and sight alike
Assailing. Moaning from the depth arose,
And gasping, and the noise of beating hands.
The banks were caked with filth the vapour left
In rolling upward from the dismal cleft,
Which sinks so deep that he alone who stands
On the mid archway of the bridge can see
Its hidden baseness. There, with useless blows,

I saw the wallowing crowd of culprits strike
The flowing filth from off their mouths. A head
Was there so soiled, I looked in doubt if he
Were priest or layman, till in wrath he bawled,
"Why dost thou scan me in my filthiness?
I am not soaking in a different mess
From those around me."

 In return I called,
"Because I knew thee when thy hair was dry.
If rightly through thy present dirt I guess
Thou art Alessio."

 Striving still to clear
His head, that like a rotten pumpkin showed,
He answered, "Yea, my flatteries brought me here.
Fair words alone have filled this dismal road."

Then spake my guide, "Look further out, for she,
That fouled sprawled harlot, whom in vain you see
Scrape off the filth with filthy nails, and try,
Now crouching at the side, now straining high,
To avoid the deluge of the dung, on earth
Was Thais, whose sweet tongue her lovers' worth
Exalted past her own. But longer stay
This trench deserves not, nor a look's delay."

Canto XIX

○ SIMON MAGUS! ○ ye pestilent!
Followers and thieves of him; who prostitute
For gold and silver things divine I Lament,
For here is your abiding. Here for you
The trumpet sounds damnation. Here I stand
On the third arch, by which your trench is spanned,
And what behold I? Heaven and earth unite
With these dark horrors, ○ Wisdom infinite!
To show the balance of thy scales is true.

Smooth on each wall the livid stone was dressed,
And pierced with holes, as where the martins nest,

But larger, and the stony floor contained
Round holes alike, in size and shape the same
As in my beauteous San Giovanni
The stands for the baptizers. Lately one
I broke to save a drowning life: let none
Reville me with an altered tale. There came
From out each hole two legs: the rest remained
Housed in the rock. The soles unceasingly
Burned, and the legs, that to the calf were bare,
So strained and kicked that any rope had burst
That held them. On the soles of these accurst
Bright flames that licked the outer surface were;
As on things oiled, they moved from heel to toe,
Flickering and dancing.

"Master, show the name
Of him whose legs from out the flood I see,
That twist and writhe and strain more furiously
Than all beside, and licked by livelier flame?"

He answered, "Somewhat if we leave the bridge,
And sideways follow the dividing ridge,
This fosse that severs from the next below,
There is a passage in the wall, too steep
For any human feet or hands to go,
But I will bear thee, if thou wilt, and so
Himself shall tell thee why so strongly leap
His fire-licked members."

I replied, "Thy will
Is mine, thou knowest. For if my voice were still,
My mind were naked to thy thought."

Left-hand

We turned along the lower boundary,
And here my Master bore me down, until
Upon the perforated flood to stand
He set me safely. Where he placed me down
I saw the lamentable legs of him
Who writhed so hardly.

"Whosoe'er thou be,
Who hast thy body thus reversed," I cried,
"Save by thy doom the power of speech has died,

I know not if I spoke too foolish-bold
But in this strain I answered, "Say what gold
Our Lord from Peter for His keys required?
Or by Matthias next was Peter hired
To yield that office that the guilty lost?
But justly dost thou pay the penal cost
Of thy betrayal. Keep that golden fee
That made thee false to Charles of Sicily
As best thou mayst. And but those Keys revered,
Which in glad life thy hands have turned, repress
Mine heart's indignant wrath, the nakedness
Of all thou wast, my harder words should say.
For avarice in thy Seat its guilt hath scared
Upon the conscience of mankind. It treads
The just man downward, and exalts the base.
A wrath foreshown by that Evangelist
Who saw the harlot with the seven heads
And the ten horns, who kept her virtuous place,
Pleasing her spouse, until the kings she kissed
In acts of fornication. Gods to you
Are gold and silver. In your eyes they shine
Deities a hundred, while the idolater,
That in your pride you excommunicate,
To one false god bends only. Constantine!
What countless evils through the years accrue,
Not that thou lovedst God's spouse, but gave to her
A wealth unseemly for her lowly state."

As thus mine indignation spake, below
If conscience waked or rage I may not know,
But wild and furious sprawled his feet. My guide
I glanced at, fearful lest his looks should chide,
And faced assent. Again he lifted me,
And by that path the boldest goat had shunned,
He bore me to the crossway back. Beneath,
The fifth great cleft gave other woes to see.

ANOTHER valley in its turn I tell.
Another guilt, another depth of hell,
Extends beneath. The great trench circular
We gazed on from the crossing arch, and far
I saw that silent weeping crowd and slow
That moves around it, as the chanters go
In earthly process of the Litanies.
But other cause for shortened steps have these,
For when my distant glance I dropped more low
On those beneath, an unfamiliar woe
They showed, neck-twisted where the body joins,
Till each his own and not his neighbour's loins
Could gaze on while he walked, and for this cause
They needs went backwards. Some by Nature's laws
Distorting palsies so may wrench, but I
Have seen nought like it, nor believe the sky
Looks down on such contortion.

Ye who read

- God give ye vintage of the words ye heed -
Reflect how I, who watched our human seed
So altered and debased, with visage dry
Could watch them. They of heavenly form bereft
So far, that where the hinder parts are cleft
The tears rolled down them as they wept, and I,
Whose eyes thereat with kindred tears were wet,
Bowed down upon the cold stone parapet,
And wept beyond controlling.

But my guide

Spake sharply. "Art thou of those fools," he said,
"Whose pity liveth where it best were dead?
For what more impious than the thought that dares
Beyond man's province, and in fancy shares
The mind of the Creator? Raise thine head.
Look up! For near us is Amyhiaraüs
For whom Hell gaped. The wondering Thebans cried,
'Why dost thou leave the war? Why hasten thus
Thy chariot horses down the steep?' But he
Nor paused, nor turned, till Minos' seat before
He stayed and trembled. Not this guise he wore
In that proud kinghood of his fame. Dost see

How loth his shoulders form his breast? He thought
To see far forward. Now his limbs are taught
To bear him backward. Next Tiresias,
Who smote too boldly with his sorcerous rod
The entangled snakes, and found his limbs transform
To woman's comelier contours, soft and warm;
Which aspect lasted till he smote again
The twisted dealers of the earlier bane.
The next is Aruns who, in Luni's hills,
Whereunder toil the Carrarese for bread,
Cave-couched amidst the marble; all the ills
That lay fore-fated in the thought of God,
He sought to read from unobstructed seas,
Or where the night her starry legions led.
Now walks he backward for his wage. With these
Observe that body with the wry-necked head
That onward shuffles, while her hair is spread
Upon the breasts we see not. Bear with me
A little while I tell. For here is she,
Manto, who after her long wandering
Found roothold in my native place. Her sire
Died, and the city of the Bacchic rites
Groaned to the scourging of an alien king,
And she went forth. In northern Italy
Where the wild Tyrol bars the German mire,
The hills are hollowed. Like an inland sea
The lake of Garda lies. A thousand streams
Flash foaming downward from the Alpine heights
From Garda to the Val Camonica
To feed it, till the basin brims, and then
Flows over at a point where all the sees,
Trentine and Brescian and Veronese,
Unite, that all their passing priests it seems
Might bless the men that dwell there. Builded strong,
To tame the Brescian and the Bergamese,

A fortress on the lower shore is seen,
And pouring outward through the pastures green,
The Garda's waters, now the Mincio,
Flow downward to Governo. First they flow

Clear, rapid, till, the level reached, they spread
In marshes stagnant, where are fevers bred
When summer heats them.

Here that virgin came,
And saw bare land amidst the reedy fen
Where no man lived. The arts we may not name
To practice, secret, with her acolytes,
This barren place she chose, and dwelt, and here
Left her vacated corse. The changing year
Saw others, guiltless of her dreadful rites,
Ingathering for the strength the marshes gave
In troublous times. On those dead bones they built
A city, and for that remembered grave
They called it Mantua. Once a race it held
More numerous, and of nobler race than now,
Before the infatuate Casalodi spilt
(Blindly by Pinamonte's craft impelled),
The lives of those who served him. This believe;
Nor other tales defrauding truth receive
Of how my city from the marsh arose."

I answered, "Master, other tale would be
Quenched coal and lifeless, since thy grace allow
That truth I hear. But wilt thou bear with me
That backward turns my mind to these that move
In that sad process underneath?"

He said:

"Regard thou him whose dusky shoulders spread
His weight of beard. A Grecian augur he
When Greece so empty of its males became
That scarce the cradles held them. Aulis heard
Eurypilus and Calchas speak the word
That loosed the cables of their ships. The tale
I told before in my great tragedy,
As well thou knowest. And here Eurypilus
Beneath thee moves. The next is Michael Scot,
Lean-flanked, who could by magic artistry
Against the demons' subtlest wiles prevail.
Guido Bonatti comes behind, and next
Asdente weeps that his vain mind forgot

His bench and leather. Mark those crones unsexed
That follow. Witchcraft with their waxen dolls
And mystic herbs they wrought, and left therefor
The seemly ordered life which Heaven extols,
The loom and needle. But the time permits
No more to tarry. Come! The western wave
At Seville yields the moon her watery grave.
Full was she two days since, that late ye saw
So thinly crescent in the pathless wood."
We left them, twisted in their sorcerous pits,
Conversing as we onward walked, until
We reached the shadow of a darker ill,
When gazing down the fifth black chasm we stood.

Canto XXI

NOW looked we downward on a darker ditch
Than those preceding. As the bubbling pitch
Boils in the great Venetian arsenal,
To caulk the wave-beat ships, when winter's call
In-herds them from repulsing seas; and there
One builds anew, and one with hard repair
Plugs the cracked ribs that heat and cold have strained,
And many friendless winds have buffeted
In many wanderings on the ocean ways.
One mends the injured stern, and one the head,
One fashions oars, one joins the broken stays,
One sews the jib, one lends his aid to spread
New mainsail for the rotten sheet and stained
That drew them inward. So they toil beside
The pitchy cauldron - so the boiling here
Filled, like a cauldron, all the trench entire,
That art Divine, and never earthly fire,
So heated. Breaking on the surface wide
Were bubbles only. Nought beside I saw,
Save that the blackness heaved, and then compressed,
Unceasing.

Sight of that retentive maw
Drew my fixed gaze, until my leader's cry

Alarmed me sharply, "Guard thee! Guard!" and I
Stayed not to look, but toward him leapt, nor guessed
Why called he, till within that safety pressed
Of his sure arm I turned me round, and there,
Across the bridge, a coal-black demon ran.
How closer shrank I from that fierce aspect I
How near the menace of the wings outspread
And lightfoot speed! His shoulders sharp and high
Sustained the haunches of a hanging man,
Whose ankles in his claws were fast.

He said:

"Ho, Taloned of the Fifth Damnation! Here
Is Santa Zita's Elder! Thrust him down!
While I for others of the sinful town
Go backward. Plenty there this goal shall win,
For all men there contrive the barterer's sin,
- Except, of course, Bonturo!"

From the bridge

He cast him, twirling. From that weight's relief
Straightening, he mounted up the stony ridge
So swift I thought that never hound on thief
Was loosed so gladly.

Plunging headlong in

The sinner sank, and rose convulsed, and writhed,
Arching his back as one who prays. There came
A cackling laughter from beneath the bridge,
And flying demons rose. "This Holy Place,"
They mocked, "befits a sanctimonious face,
But nought it saves thee from thy bathing. Ho!
Ye swim not here as in the Serchio.
It is not willed a naked part to show,
Except the knives shall slice it."

As the cooks

Around the boiler group with waiting prongs,
To thrust the carcass if it rise too far
Above the broth that stews it, so did they
The twisting sinner with a score of hooks,
Clamoring derisive. "Find thy place below,
Where mayst thou pilfer in thy private way
If aught attract thee there."

My Master said,
"Wait here, and fear not. Where the buttress swells
Crouch down, and hide, and whatsoe'er to me
Of outrage or repulse you hear or see
You need not tremble. Through the deeper
An earlier time I came, and proved their dread."

I crouched - and trembled. Down the central bridge
He went and left me. Ere he gained the ridge
That barred it from the next succeeding woe
The demons marked him. As the dogs outfly,
White-fanged and deafening, if a varlet show
A mood to linger at the gate, they came,
A rush of wings and drags outreached. Stout heart
He needed surely. But his voice outrang
Steadfast. "No victim for your rage am I.
Stand back! Ye know the heavy stripes that tame
Revolt. What! Would ye drag me? Stand apart.
Let one come forward. When he learns my name
Then choose ye freely."

Croaked the grisly crew,
"Let Foultail test him," and the fiend advanced
Maligantly confident. "What power," he said,
"Delays we bathe thee? Leap, or fork and fang
Shall teach it!" Backward at the troop he glanced,
That stirred impatient. But my leader knew
The Power that cloaked him.

"Thinkest thou thus, misled,
I blundered downward for thy sport? I come
Divinely messaged, where propitious fate
Hath willed another through these depths to show.
The greater demons at the outer gate
Have learnt it. Scatheless past thy ward we go.
To me the outrage of thy cries is dumb.
Thy hooks are pointless."

At these words the fiend,
Sore daunted, drooped his ghastly tool, and cried,
"We must not strike him," to the rest, and I,
Who till this time the friending buttress screened,
My guide called forward. At the word I ran

Across the fearful space to reach his side,
The demons crowding as I came. (I saw
The footmen at Caprona once, who shrank
As I did, when they looked, and rank on rank
Their weaponed foes were round them, and they stood
Protected only by the rules of war
Against the crowd that yelled their deaths.) They would
The thing they dared not, but their lust began
To conquer prudence. Each the next would egg
To nick me. "Score him on the rump." - "Do thou." -
"Do thou then." - "Hook him, Hellbat, by the leg."

But Foultail railed against them, "Cease thee now,
Scarmiglione, lest the price we pay."
And then to us, - "Ye seek a broken way.
A thousand and two hundred years ago
And sixty-six, it was but yesterday,
And five hours later, Hell's foundations so
Were wrenched and shaken, that the bridge beyond
Was flung in fragments to the chasm below.
Along the margin of the boiling pond
Ye needs must go some distance. There I send
A swift patrol, lest any crawling wretch
Beyond the pitch his blackened limbs extend.
Ye may go safely in their guard. They know
Too well to trick ye. Alichino here,
And Calcabrina, and Cagnazzo thou,
With Ciriatto of the tusks, and those
Who form the ten that Barbariccia leads,
Fanged Draghignazzo, Graffiacane,
Hellbat, and Libicocco next, and he
That deepest-hued in peculation glows,
Fierce Rubicante. Oft the boiling breeds
Such boldness that the sinners seek relief
Along the margin, to their greater grief.
Search well. But guide these twain in safety through,
Along the crags that edge the boiling glue,
Until ye reach the nearest cliff that stands
Unbroken, and bisects the trench."

I said,

"O Master, let us seek the path unled
Than in such escort I Mark them glance and grin.
They nudge, expectant that their sport begin
When once from Foultail's sight we pass. For me,
I would not further, on a path I see
More dreadful hourly."

"Fear thou nought for that,"
My Master answered; "thee they grin not at,
But in the malice of their hope to fetch
Clear of the pond and flay some crawling wretch
That leaves the boiling."

By the leftward bank
We then went forward in that grisly rank.

Canto XXII

MUCH have I seen of camps and moving men,
But not that escort of the demons ten
My mind compares. Not Campaldino saw
Such sight uncouth; nor any rout of war,
Pageant or masque, grotesque or carnival,
Mummery or tilt, can aught their like recall.
Nought in Italian lands, or lands afar,
Nor barque by landfall steered, or leading star,
Nought moves, on earth or wave or heavens of air,
Like those swart fiends, our chosen escort, were.
"Who wills to church must there with saints consort:
Who seeks the tavern must with guzzlers sport."
So runs the proverb. With these demons we
Paced the black verge that ringed the dreadful sea.
Yet little heed my mind allowed to know
Their various aspects vile. For seethed below
That lake of pitch the where in burning heat
The unclean of hand received their payment meet.
Most was I bent to learn the dole they knew
Whose sins their souls within that cauldron threw.
As dolphins, restless of the storm to be,
Arch their swift backs above the heaving sea,
Whereby the seamen, peril-warned, prepare

To meet fierce winds with decks and spars stripped bare,
So seemed, one instant's snatched release to gain,
Some sinner twisting in that boiling pain,
A shorter moment than the lightnings take,
Would arch his back from out the burning lake.
As wary frogs that round the stagnant ditch
Show noses only, so the bubbling pitch
Showed eyes of sinners, wide in watchful fright,
That instant as the taloned imps they sight
Sank in the slime. And as one frog may stay,
While all beside have dived and slipped away,
I saw (and shudder still in thought to see),
How one delayed, and Graffiacani
Bared his great claws, and clutched the diving head
By pitchy locks, and from that burning bed
Forth hauled him. So perchance yourselves have seen
A fresh-speared otter from the water green
Dragged, writhing.

 Closing round their piteous prey,
"O rend him, Rubicante, rend and flay!"
Cried the obscene crew. But I to Virgil then,
"O Master, couldst thou of the souls of men
Learn whom they seize, ere yet, their work complete,
They backward fling him to the liquid heat?"

Close stepped my guide, at which the fiends controlled
Parted and stilled, and half reluctant hold
They loosed, the while he asked what sinful name
Men spake on earth that there to torture came.
And while the fiends their horrid trade delayed,
The wretch, ere yet his quivering pelt was flayed,
Gave answer. "Fathered by a waster wild,
Born in Navarre, my mother sold her child,
Constrained by hunger, to a lord's employ;
Then to King Thibault (yet himself a boy),
My fawning service passed. By bribe and cheat
I bought the lease of this unending heat."

As thus constrained his trembling lips allowed
The sin that cast him to that grisly crowd,

Side-thrust beneath his belly's rounded cup
The tusk of Ciriatto ripped him up.

As some caught mouse by wicked cats at play
Is tossed and toyed, he fared; but "Stand away!"
Snarled Barbariccia, while his limbs he twined
The victim round, and held, before, behind,
Joined in one piece. "If more thou wouldst," he said,
"Ask, ere we cast him to the deathless dead!"
And while the fiends forewent their labour sweet
To fling his entrails to the bubbling heat,
My Master asked him, "In the boiling flood
What others meet ye of your country's blood?"
He answered, "One not distant far from those,
A wretch Sardinian born, beside me rose
Last ere they snatched me from the lake away.
I would with him in scalding heat I lay
From slitting tusk secure, and plunging prong!"

But Libicocco cried "We wait too long!"
And ere his hook the chieffer fiend could stay,
Mangling and tearing from the bone away
The greater forepart of the arm, it fell.
While Draghignazzo next, a thought more slow,
Snatched downward, reaching for the legs below,
And clamouring rose again those birds of Hell.
But their Decurion wheeled, and loose thereat
His tortured captive wrenched, and railed and spat,
Cursing discordant till they stilled.

Once more

My Master asked him, "When they dragged ashore
Your form reluctant from the burning slime
Whom left ye happier?"

He, some passing time,
Gazed at his wound, with vacant eyes; but when
Were restless motions from the demons ten,
Made hurrying answer. "Friar Gomita he,
That Pisa's lord, across Sardinia's sea,
Sent, trustful, for Gallura's rule. He made
His profit ever from his trust betrayed.

His lord's worst foes the smoothing bribe could pay,
And work his loss their quiet unhindered way:
A pot was he where every fraud would stew;
No theft was whispered but the worse he knew:
No knave was he, but very king, of wrong.
Michel, who sang on earth an equal song,
And held the neighbouring rule, beside him lies" -
But here he caught the Hell-bird's glittering eyes
Fixed on him, lustful for the hindered prey,
And all his cunning mind extreme of fear
Made active - "surely, would ye seek to hear
Tuscan or Lombard that on earth ye knew,
I need but call to bring the tortured crew.
For ever, if the demon chase be slack,
And one from out the scald a scourgeless back
Heaves from the clinging pitch, and crawls impune
Out on the marsh, with cautious signal soon
He whistles to his boiling mates to try
The like relief; and in such note will I
So call them. Only bid the demon band
Some little backward in the shades to stand,
To give them heart."

His snout Cagnazzo raised,
Contemptuous of the fraud, and sniffed, and gazed
Derisive round. "The sinner thinks," he said,
"To plunge once more in that infernal bed,
When backward in the shades we hide."

But he
Whined with new guile. "I might not hope to flee
Thy swifter wings. I only thought to know
Those others rendered to a kindred woe,
As malice moved me."

Swift Alichino
Gave answer. "If the steep descent ye try
We shall not trace your steps, but stooping fly
Straight for the pitch, and wait you there to rend.
Call whom ye will, but if ye fraud intend
Dear price ye pay. - We will the slope ascend
Some space, and o'er the bank's reverse conceal
Our waiting wings, the while the larger meal

His malice brings us." Thus, their mood reversed,
The cheat prevailed. Cagnazzo first, who first
Derided, now the offered sport would try,
To draw more victims from their steaming sty.

The demons turned their eyes, the ridge to climb,
A moment upward. Swift his chosen time
The desperate sinner seized, and leapt.

Aware

Instant, while yet he cleft the yielding air,
The broad-winged demon that had snapped the snare,
Grouped his close vans, and like a falling kite
Shot headlong lakeward, as a stone should smite.
Yet deftly, as the sinner sank from sight,
With wings outreached, and lifted breast aright
Retrieved, and screaming in his rage of prey
Skimmed the black gulf.

But close behind his way
Came Calcabrina, great of wing as he,
And all his rage the baffled chase to see
Against Alichino turned. New sport we saw.
Demon on demon leapt, with tooth and claw
Tearing. For while the prey they plunged to pluck
Sank in the seething like a diving duck,
The frustrate falcons flapped and clutched, and tore,
Smote with wide wings, and closed and overbore
Each other, turning in mid-air, and fell.

Were laughter here, if any depth of Hell
Could hold it. Happed they on that surface hot,
Their victims' torments theirs, and all forgot
Their mutual rage in screaming pain. They drew
Separate: they strove with desperate strength anew
Their wings to lift from out the holding glue,
But vainly.

Fast their fellow demons flew
With shrill laments above the vaporous ditch,
And while they sank within the boiling pitch,
From either side at Barbariccia's call
Lined banks, their mates with hooks and drags to haul

To land. Still sinking as we turned away,
Sprawled on the marsh, the nightmare demons lay.

Canto XXIII

WE did not wait that escort more, but trod
A silent path in thoughtful guise, as go
The Minor Friars through the streets arow,
One after one, and those renounced of God,
Demon and barterer, we left.

I thought

Of Aesop's fable of the frog that drew
The mouse behind it to the drowning flood,
And how that sinner in the boiling glue,
Beyond design, the chasing demons brought
To find a like disaster. Thought to thought
As Yea to Ay were kindred. Then my blood
Chilled through me as my mind advanced to see
How rage might wake against us, as the cause
Not only that the sinner missed their claws,
But that their comrades in such snare were caught,
And backward gazed I, and my guide besought,
"O Master, save thou hide thyself and me
Most swiftly, terror shakes my heart to see
Those demons tear us, for their broken sport.
Their malice, restive at our heels that ran,
If rage recruit it, not their leader's ban
Nor thought of later stripes shall hold. My fear
So urges that meseems the empty rear
Is dark with wings that chase us."

He replied,

"No leaded mirror moving at thy side
More instant would return thy shape than I
Receive thy thoughts unspoken. Rising nigh,
The rampart is not too precipitous
For careful scaling; if it falleth thus
Upon the further side, we soon shall stand
Beyond their peril."

Ere the ruse he planned

Was action, with a whirl of wings they came
Outrageous, imminent, but my guide (as she
Who wakens to the roar of nearing flame,
And reaches for the babe with hasty hand
That life outvalues, and no more delays,
Even for the covering of her shift, but forth
She flies incontinent), against their wrath
Upcaught me in his arms, and raced to gain
The rock's high ridge that was their boundary.
And on the verge he loosed his feet, and slid
The abrupt decline.

As fast as down the spout
The water gushes to the landmill's wheel,
So shot he down the shelving bank. The rout
Of chasing demons, e'er his feet could feel
The level depth, had reached the wall, hut there
He feared them nothing, while they raged in vain,
For high controlling Providence provides
No serving demon strays beyond the sides
Of that sad hollow where his task is hid.

Now in recovered safety looked we round.
Beside us moved, with weeping eyes to ground,
A people clad in golden cloaks, whereon
To gaze was dazzling. Very tired and sad
Their looks, and slow their steps to pass belief.
And I, in doubt, who could not gauge their grief,
Gazed wondering. Such depth of hoods they had,
In shape as those the monks wear at Cologne;
In golden brilliance like their cloaks they shone.

O shining sepulchre of moldering bone I
For all within was lead: - such weight that those
In which the second Frederick burnt his foes
Were light as straw contrasted. Oh, what weight
In which to barter with eternal fate I

Left-hand we moved along their file, but though
They moved alike, they strained a pace so slow,
Bent with the load they bore, that every stride

A fresh face gave us that we moved beside:
And still from all the gasping sobs arose.
I asked my leader, "Will thy care provide
When next we pass whose name or tale I know,
That there we pause?"

From out a backward hood
There came a voice from one that understood
My Tuscan speech. "If here thou list to stay,
Whose feet so strangely dance the dismal way,
Thy wish may wait thee."

Then I turned and saw
Two shades that struggled, but the dreadful law
That held them, made their haste as nought. Desire
Was in their looks to reach us, and my guide
Commanded: "Pause, and keep some space beside
With gradual motions like their own."

We stayed
Some moments patient, though three strides entire
Had reached us. Nought they spake at first, but long
With slanting eyes they summed us, and at last,
Communing only to themselves, they said:
"How moves his throat! Can mortal life belong
To wanderers here? Or if their lives be past
How walk they through this trench ungarmented?"

And then to me: "O Tuscan, these sad pits
Form the last college of the hypocrites,
And more we tell thee if thou dost not scorn
To teach us of what race thyself wast born."
I answered: "I was born and nurtured nigh
Where Arno finds the blue reflected sky
A city's turrets pierce. By ways forbade,
Clothed with the living flesh that first I had,
A High Power leads me. But yourselves shall show
Why from your eyes distils this dismal woe,
And what the shining pain around you clad."

The nearer answered: "Jovial Friars were we.
I Catalano, Loderingo he:
Bologna-born, and Florence chose us twain,

From either faction, jointly to maintain
Her peace internal. Still thine eyes may meet,
In those charred ruins of Gardingo Street,
The witness what we were."

My tongue began,

"O Friars, your evil - " when I marked a man
Writhe on the ground. To feel their weight he lay
Nailed down with three great stakes across the way.

Friar Catalano caught my glance, and said:
"That wretch, cross-fixed, on whom in turn we tread,
Is he who counselled with the priests, '*For us
It is expedient that one man should die -*
Naked and staked to bear our burdens thus
Annas alike, and all that council lie -
A seed of evil for the Jews were they."
I watched my Master gaze in wonder down
On that prone shade, outpulled and crucified
That from their weight he might not writhe aside,
Who there in everlasting exile lay,
But had not suffered when he passed that way
Beforetime. Nothing of his thought he said;
But later to the Friar he turned: "If nought
Of retribution wait thy word, I pray,
Thou wilt not here deny thine aid, but say
If further to the right in vain were sought
Some exit from this depth, or if we need
A loth return to make, and intercede
With those black angels that we left."

The Friar

Gave answer: "Nearer than ye think doth lie
The next of those convergent cliffs that span,
From the great barrier to the central pit,
These depths of pain. This only arch of it
Has fallen, but the slope a mortal man
May clamber, for the ruins pile so high
Toward the lower bank ye seek."

My guide

Pondered awhile: "If this be truth, he lied
Who hooks the speculators."

And the Friar
Gave nimble answer: "At Bologna well
We knew the devil, and all his works. A liar,
And father of all lies from there to Hell,
They called him."

Then with longer steps my
And somewhat angered in his looks that so
The imp had dared him, forward went, and I
In his loved footsteps left their laden woe.

Canto XXIV

IN that young month of the returning year
When, in Aquarius placed, the mounting
Shakes loose his hair a bolder course to run,
The hoarfrost takes his sister's face of fear,
A moment only. Then the husbandman,
As wanes the night before the equal day,
Looks forth, a world of winter-white to scan,
And knows the frugal store of roots and hay
Is ended, and laments, and smites his thigh,
And through the house as one distraught he goes;
But shortly forth again he looks, and knows
The world has changed its face, and cheerily
Takes crook, and chases out his flock to feed.
So I, that did my Master's anger heed,
Awhile was daunted, till we came to where
That tumbled ruin through the somber air
Rose darkly, when he turned with smile as sweet
As on that mountain when he stayed my feet
At our first meeting.

Careful glance he cast
Along the huge mound of the broken rock,
And then as one who picks his point at last,
And doubts no more, from block to tumbled
He led me upward, with a reaching arm,
And voice that warned my blinder steps. No way
Was this for those of golden cloaks to flee,
That scarcely for his lighter frame, or me

His arm sustained, a trembling hold supplied;
And but that to the lower bank we strained
(For Malebolge to the central pit
Inward and downward slopes from every side),
I know not if my guide the crest had gained,
But sure I had not.

When my feet attained
The last rent fissure, the projecting stone
With failing strength I grasped, and reaching it,
My breath drained from me by that toil, to sit
Some space I thought, but while I sank he said:
"Thou must not rest thee here, but here and now
Make conquest of thy sloth, for while abed,
Forgetful of the hours, warm-blanketed,
Men rest, or sitting loose at ease, they find
No fame, but life consumes, they watch not how;
As foam on water, or as smoke in air,
A moment passes, and it is not there.
Arise! and with thy spirit's strength contend
Against the flesh that drags thee. Thus shall end
Revolt, except the ignoble soul allow
The body's weight to sink it. Not enough
Is wrought that thus the deeper trench we quit.
Be thine to comprehend, and with the wit
The will for action."

Narrow, steep and rough,
Yet rose the path across the ridge that led,
But shamed to hear my leader's words I feigned
A strength I had not. "In thy steps," I said,
"I follow, confident," and further speech
I made, the while the rampart's crest we gained,
To hide my faintness from myself. Thereat
A voice made answer from the further deep,
Bestial, and formless of clear words to reach
The hearer's mind, but not this loss forgot
The notes of wrath.

Above the further steep
Now stood we, but my living sight was vain
To pierce the blackness whence that awful cry
Reproached me.

"Master, while we here remain.
I hear, but nought it means, and nought I see
Down-gazing. Wilt thou that the further wall
We gain, and climbing by the shorter fall,
Perchance in safety our descents repeat?"

He said: "For fit request a fit reply
Is action only." Leading silently,
He crossed the bridge, and on the eighth surround
A vantage of sufficient sight I found
That showed the seventh and more dreadful woe
Than those behind. For serpents here I saw
Hideous and frightful in their throngs, as though
All Libya and the red Egyptian sea
Had swarmed them. While I write my heart at war
With recollection backward holds my blood,
Shuddering. For not the Libyan sands shall be,
Nor all the plagues of the Egyptian flood,
Nor all that Ethiopia spawns, alike
Prolific. Not the crested water-snake,
The cobra, nor the leaping jaculus,
The speckled death, the serpent formed to strike
From either end, such horror holds.

I saw

A people naked, with no hole to take
For refuge, blindly in their fear that ran
Amidst this ruthless and appalling throng.
O for the spotted heliotrope I that thus
They might escape unseen. But not this law
Could charms resist. To snakes their hands belong
Snakes through their loins are pierced. I watched a man
Against whose throat a sudden serpent bit,
More swiftly than the shortest word is writ
Take fire, and burn, and in his place there came
A little heap of ashes. As the flame
In cinders sank, a sight most marvellous
Was mine - the calcined heap reversed the wrong,
Arising to its human form. 'Tis said
The Phoenix thus, on tears of incense fed,
That eats no herb, or any coarser bread,

With each five hundred years is purified,
And rises thence as though it had not died,
From its own ash again incarnated.

But as some demon-haunted soul may fall
Unconscious, writhing, nor the fit recall,
But weak and pallid to his feet again
He struggles dumbly in bewildered pain,
So looked the sinner. What scale of Heaven was here
To weight a doom so dreadful, so severe?

"Who art thou?" asked my guide, and answered he:
"A short while since I rained from Tuscany
To this ferocious gutter. A life more beast
Than human pleased me there. Pistoia well
My savage carnal ways, till here I fell,
Denned, native, Vanni Fucci, mule, am I."

I answered: "Though thy bestial crimes to hell
Have flung thee rightly, yet I rede not well
Why to this lower depth thou cam'st?"

And he

Feigned not to hear, but in a dismal shame
Gazed blankly upward, till constrained he said,
"Not for those crimes of loud repute I came
To this relentless doom. Reluctfully
It wrenches all my heart with grief to say
My guilt - more bitter than when first the dead
I joined, and Minos cast me here. My sin
Was this, that having robbed the sacristry
I spake not, while Rampino tortured lay,
And della Nona died, a guilt to pay
Which was not theirs. For that false crime herein
The serpents take me at their lust - but thou
Shalt go not backward with light heart to tell
My townsmen of this hidden infamy,
Nor joy to watch me in this pass - I see
A thing that cometh on earth. Short year from now
Thy part shall from my native place expel
The Neri, and their wealth shall confiscate.

But then shall Florence cleanse her lawless state;
Thy faction, outcast from her palaces,
Shall suffer all they gave, till Mars shall bring
A flaming vapour of such fierce disease
From Val di Magra, that the trembling knees
Of each Bianco on Piceno's plain
Shall bleeding bow. I would not tell this thing
Could any prescience on thy part restrain
The sorrow for thee which my heart foresees."

Canto XXV

HIS words he ended, and his bestial mind
Reverted to its impious use. He raised
Both hands in gestures of obscenity
Against the Eternal, till my heart inclined
To bless the serpents. One, that leapt behind
Just as he shouted, "Take it, God! at Thee
I aim it," twisted round his throat, to bind
His further utterance. One, his arms about,
Its tightening knots o'er wrists and elbows twined
To cease his antics. Ah, Pistoia! why
Dost never, when thy bitter factions burn
Their foemen's houses, and are sacked in turn,
The whole send upward to the cleansing sky
In one consuming? since thy sons exceed
The first corruptions of the godless seed
That built thee. All the infernal depths I trod
Revealed no shade with such contempt for God.

But while we looked, with sudden haste he fled,
And past us raced a Centaur-shape who said,
"Where hides the snarling thief I seek?"

I know

Maremma, nor believe its fens could show
So numerous snakes as round his haunches hung
And twisted in their wrath, and thereamong,
Even to the human part, behind his head
A fiery dragon broods with wings outspread,

That burn, and render all they reach to flame.

Then said my Master, "Cacus here we see,
Who made of old beneath Mount Aventine
Beneath his brethren, for the theft of shame
A lake of blood. To this great depth he came,
That there he wrought. He ceased his perfidy,
Taught by the raining blows of Hercules, -
A hundred mased him, though he felt but ten."

On rushed the Centaur in his haste to seize
The fleeing shade, and while we gazed ahead
We saw not that beneath there came three men
That watched us, till they cried, "Who are ye there?"
Whereat the Centaur left our thoughts, and these
Possessed them. One man to his neighbour said,
"Why tarries Cianfa?" By that word aware
Of those that faced me, to my guide I signed
Desire for silence.

Reader, if this tale
Thy mind reject, I blame thee nought, for I
Look back, and memory here and credence find
Dispute. A monster with a serpent's tail,
And with six feet along the ground that ran,
Made halt before the three, and picked a man,
And leapt upon him. No clinging ivies twine
So closely. In his face its teeth it set.
Its forward feet behind his shoulders met.
Its belly on his belly pressed. Its feet
Strained to his sides and thighs, to backward meet.
Its tail between his legs, along his spine
Curled upwards. As a lighted paper burns
And blackens, but at first to brown it turns
Before the flames have reached it, so did they
Transform and blend, until you might not say
The serpent-hue was that, or this was man,
And then, as melted wax, their forms began
To merge and mingle. Cried his comrades, "Lo,
Where art - what art - which art thou, Agnello?
Art both or neither?" The two heads by now

Were one. The bodies were a monstrous sight.
A man was snake: a reptile walked upright.
With dragging steps it left us.

Hast thou seen
The lizards changing hedge? From side to side
They cross the sun-glare of the roadway wide
A baffling streak. So fast a reptile shot
Toward these two remaining. Smoking hot,
And black as peppercorn it showed. It leapt
And pierced the navel of the one. It stept
Some paces back, and crouched, and watched. Its eyes
Its victim held, and he with dull surprise
Yawning, as one by sleep or fever dazed,
No motion made to fly, but backward gazed
Tranced. From the reptile's mouth, the navel's hole,
There came two smokes that feeling through the air
Were joined. The serpent and the human soul
In this conjunction stayed. Let Lucan prate
No more the horror of Nasidius' fate,
Nor how Sabellus failed from sight. I bear
No envy to the tales that Ovid made
Of Cadmus to a serpent changed, or how
Sad Arethusa is a fountain now.
They did not dream the thing I saw. The shade
That once was man his dreadful doom obeyed.
He closed his feet. His legs and thighs as one
Were blended. All that to his form was done
The snake reversed. Its tail it cleft. The skin
On the divided parts I saw begin
To shed its scales and soften; while the man
Acquiring that the snake had lost, began
To alter snakelike his retractile limb.
Lengthened the worm's short arms: the arms of him
Shortened and scaled. The man's fifth member then
Lengthened and slit, the worm's hind legs to match.
The worm's hind legs their shrinking claws attach,
And blend to form the part concealed of men.

The copulating smoke around them spread.
The man grew bald. The needed hair was bred

Upon the snake's transforming parts. His head
The foul beast lifted, and arose upright.
The man fell prostrate. But the thievish light
Still kindled in their baleful eyes, the while
Their faces altered, and the shape erect,
- For which was human? - their completed guile
In altered visage showed. Its jaws withdrew.
A nose and lips it formed, and ears outgrew.
The while that other on the ground that lay,
Forked its thin tongue, and turned, and crawled away.
And like a snail that hides its horns, I saw
The ears receding in the serpent head.
Loud hissing down the dismal trench it sped,
And after ran the worm transformed, and tried
A sputtering speech.

But scarce my mind could think
Clear thought, or eyes see clearly, while the law
That ruled the refuse of this hateful sink
Changed and rechanged them. Yet I marked the last
Of those three shades, that slyly shrank aside,
Desirous only from my glance to hide, -
Puccio Sciancato. Him the serpents passed
Without molesting while I stayed. The one
I saw transformed was he for whom Gaville
Yet wails the vengeance that it cowered to feel,
Because his murder in its streets was done.

Canto XXVI

REJOICE, my Florence I that thy lifted wings
Not only in the world's wide sunlight shine,
Not only o'er the waves of ocean beat;
In Hell's deep vaults an equal fame is thine.
Five thieves, - and every thief a Florentine!
So thought I grimly, as we turned to meet
The cliff's ascent. But if the morning brings
The mind God's counsel, if its dreams be true,
Then that dark end desired of Prato's hate,
And all thy sullen, greedy foes, for you

Comes quickly. Not that were today the date
It were too soon for those who love thee. Yea,
I would that that which cometh came today.
For grief that on my weaker age shall weigh
Were now less dreadful.

Rough the rising stair
That hard we clomb with foot and hand and knee,
And very silent all, and lonely there,
The ridge we crossed a keener grief to see.
Grief were it to gaze, and still that grief to me
Comes sharply, as my thoughts reluctant draw
Their wells of memory for the thing I saw.
With pain I speak, for if the holier law
Myself I hold, by any kindly star,
Or Power supernal, guided safely through
The world's stretched snares, I would not boast nor tell
As one who triumphs, that these depths of Hell
Contain such fruitage of our kind.

The view
Beneath us was an empty depth, wherethrough
Lights moved, abundant as the fireflies are
At even, when the gnats succeed the flies.
A myriad gleams the labourer sees who lies
Above them, resting, while the vale below
Already darkens to the night, - he toiled
From dawn to store the ripened grapes, or till
The roots around, and on the shadowing hill
Reclines and gazes down the vale. As he,
Whose mockers felt the she-bears' teeth, beheld
The chariot-horses rise erect to reach
The heavens of air, with searching eyes could see
At last, a little climbing flame afar,
That faded, cloudlike, as the fiery car
Ascended past his mortal sight, so here
Along the gutter of the fosse there came,
And passed, and left us, many a roving flame,
That seemed flame only, yet a human soul
Held each, but hid from sight the thief it stole.

This marvel of the moving flames to see,

I stretched from off the bridge so eagerly
I slipped, and falling grasped a rocky spar,
Alone that saved me from that depth. My guide
The answer to my eager search supplied.
"Within those moving flames the tortured are.
Each in his garment wraps himself from sight."

"Master, a truth already guessed aright
Thy word makes surer. Much I long to know
What spirit swathed in that wide fire doth go,
That flickers upward in two flames, as though
It rose combined from that reluctant pyre
Where, with his brother, burnt Eteocles,
To form two pillars of divided fire,
Because no death could quench their enmities?"

He answered, "Twain are in that flame; they run
Together now because they sinned as one.
Ulysses tortured there, and Diomed,
Repent the treason of the horse, that led
To Rome's foundation - through the fated door
The exiles issuing; and the trick lament
Through which still weeps in death Deidamia
For her lost Achilles; and furthermore
They suffer for the thieved Palladium."

"Master," I answered, "if they be not dumb
With so much anguish, let them speak, I pray,
- A thousand prayers I pray thee! - Grant we stay
Till that horned flame come hither! You see me bend
Almost to falling with desire."

He said:

"Thy prayer is praise to him that prays it. Yea;
I grant; but hearken. When they pass below
Keep silent. Thee they might disdain, but I
Will ask thy purpose."

When they came more nigh,
He hailed them. "Ye who from one fire ascend
A twofold flame, I charge ye, if ye owe
A quittance to me for the lofty lay

Wherein I praised your earthly fames, I pray
That here ye pause, the while that one shall say
Of where at last he wandered forth to die."

At this was shaking of the greater horn,
And murmurs not at first articulate, -
A flame that by the wind is trailed and torn
To flickers, - till the end made animate
Wagged like a tongue, and answered, -

"When I turned

Aside from Circe's later lure, and left
The mount that Æneas named, my heart forgot
My aged father, I regarded not
My fondness for my child, my wife bereft
Of her due rights of love, but through my heart
Again the unconquerable ardour burned
To search experience of the world, anew
The vice and valour of mankind to view,
And seek the events of lonely lands apart
From known adventures of my race. I chose
One ship, and with a little band of those
With heart to follow, steered for open sea,
And left behind the morning.

Either shore,

Spain and Morocco saw we, and between
Sardinia and the isles. At length was seen
That narrow passage of the meeting seas,
Whereat the warning stands of Hercules
That no man dare to pass it. Old were we,
Myself and my companions, old and slow,
When Ceuta lay behind us, and Seville
Was fading on the right, and westward still
We pointed.

"Brothers," to the rest I said,

"O brothers, following where my star hath led,
That not a thousand shapes of pain could dread
From this so great adventure. Hear me now.
Deny not that we add to all our gains,
While the brief vigil hour of life remains,
Experience of the unpeopled world that lies
Behind the lights of sunset. Think ye now,

We are not fashioned as the brute that dies,
But born for virtue and exploit."

Thereat

Such ardour waked that had I sought to stay
I scarce had ruled them. Still the moving poop
Looked back, and left the dawn. A southward loop
We sailed, still bending to the left, the while
We laboured weakly at the oars, and mile
To foolish mile extended, till we moved
Beneath strange stars in unacquainted skies.
Five times the bright bowl of the moon had filled,
Five times through heaven its silver light had spilled,
When as we toiled that silent waste of way,
A mountain, drear and vast, in distance lay.
A mountain of such height and magnitude
As all my wandering life I had not viewed:
But short was our rejoicing. From the land
A tempest smote us. Thrice the beaten prow
Whirled round with all its waters: either hand
The rising waves assailed our decks, and now
The bows tossed upwards, now the poop, for He
At last had spoken. Overwhelmed were we;
And closed again the solitary sea."

Canto XXVII

THE flame was silent, and erect and still
Moved from us with my leader's leave.

There came

Behind another and more restless flame
That strove for speech, and found its thwarted will
Gave only noise of whistling sounds, until
The words worked upward through the fire, as erst
The tyrant heard the brass Sicilian bull, -
That justly for its roasting victim first
He filled with its designer, - turn his cries
To bull-like bellowing. So the cunning file
Had tuned its throat.

But now the call he tries,

Vibrating upward to the tongue's intent,
Sounds clearer. "Thou - O dear and wonderful! -
Who bringest that loved speech of Lombardy,
Thou whose familiar words to him that went,
'Go now, I urge no further,' called me on,
Though late, to plead thy patience. Pause, I pray,
Some longer space. Although so wrapt, to me
It irks not if I hear thee. This blind way
We burn, but may not lighted, if ye fell
But lately from the Latian land, from where
The endless burden of my guilt I bear,
If peace is on Romagna, wilt thou tell?
For I was native of the mountains there
Between Urbino and the heights from whence
The Tiber rises."

Still I downward bent,
And leant far outward in my eagerness,
Whereat my Leader, from my fixed intent
To call me, touched me on the side, and said,
"Speak thou, - is here no Greek's impertinence
To scorn thee."

I thereat, who willed no less,
Spake swiftly, "O sad spirit, so garmented
In flame no glance can reach thee, still thy land
Hath tyrants, in their hearts devising war,
But nought of open strife I lately saw,
And still within its ancient walls doth stand
The strength of thy Ravenna. Still doth brood
Polenta's eagle, and his pinions spread
Above its roofs, and Cervia's. Forli now,
Its siege and slaughter of its foes forgot,
The Green Claws hold anew. Verrucchio
Hath still its mastiff, and his young, who show
The teeth that tore Montagna. Still doth plot
The little lion in his lair of snow
To friend both factions, and his rule admit
Lamone's and Santerno's towns. That one
Constricted in its narrow space that lies
Between the mountains and the Savio,
So between tyrant rule and freedom won

Alternates. As I answer all, for it
Requite me. Tell me, as I half surmise,
Who wast thou? Tell me all thy tale, that so
Thy name on earth shall stablish."

Then the flame
Roared without speech awhile, but in the end
The flickering point gave utterance. "If ye came
To count our tortures, and to earth ascend
To tell them, nothing would ye hear from me,
For all your pleading. But I know too well
There is no issue from this depth of Hell
For those who enter. With no fear of shame
I tell thee. By the sword I lived. Amend
To Heaven I schemed, and took St. Francis' cord
Not vainly, and my hope had fruited well,
But evil take the false Pope Boniface!
Who led me to my earlier sins. The sword
I lived by, but my deeds from infancy
The fox's wiles and shifts and secret shame
Had practised, till my cunning crafts became
A byword through the earth for perfidy.
When to the age I came at which mankind
Should turn the haven of the soul to find
From voyaging on life's alluring sea,
Drop sails and wind their idle ropes, and so
Pass inward on the tide with steerage slow,
Then was I grieved for all my boast before,
And with repentance wept, - alas, the woe!
It might have saved me.

Through this cord I wore
I served the Chief Priest of the Pharisees,
Who warred, - but not with Jews, and not with those
Who conquered Acre. Nor his Christian foes
Were merchants in the Soldan's land who dwelt,
But in the precincts of the Lateran
Christ's priest the Christian who beside him dwelt
Distressed with violence. Not his vows, nor dread
Of his high office as the Church's Head,
Nor reverence for my cord, that used to make
The wearers leaner, stayed him. Constantine

So called Silvestro from Soracte's cave
To cure him leprous, as this godless man
Besought my counsel. As a fool may rave
In drunken pride I thought him. Word of mine
He got not to inspire his guilt. At last
He urged me, 'Doubt not that thy choice be cast
With wisdom, if thou do the thing I bid.
I do absolve and bless thee even now
Before the words have passed thy lips. Do thou
Contrive that I shall gain Penestrino.
Forget not I can open or forbid
The Eternal Gate. The Keys that Celestine
So lightly loosed are twain.
Alike of Heaven and Hell.'

He urged me thus
Till speech than silence seemed less dangerous,
Whereon I answered, 'Father, since my guilt
Thou cleanest ere I tell thee. If thou wilt,
In one way canst thou triumph - all they will
In solemn treaty seal, - and nought fulfil.'

'I died, and to St. Francis' care consigned
My parting spirit, but there came behind
A shape that seized me by the hair, and cried
Against my Patron, 'Make no claim for him.
'Tis he who gave the counsel fraudulent.
I have not left him since. Can man repent
The while he sins? The contradiction here
Defies thy rescue, and the guilt is clear.'

'I turned, and one of Hell's Black Cherubim
Leered back. 'Thou didst not think with all thy craft
I studied logic in the schools?' he laughed.
He bore me down to Minos' seat, and he
Eight times his tail around his fearful back
Entwined, and gnawed it in his rage, and said
'Is here a sinner for the depths,' and me
He bade them fling to where I should not lack
My like, 'Down-cast him to the thievish fire
That hides its victims in its fold,' and so

For ever in this robe of pain I go;
My craft, that to my safe repentance led,
- That craft betrayed me to a fate so dire."

We left him wailing, and the writhing flame
Tossed its sharp horn for further speech, but we
No longer paused, but upward climbed, and came
To that next arch which spans a baser woe.
For suffering here were those who wrought to sow
Dissension - guilt the fruit, and here the fee.

Canto XXVIII

WHO in free words, without restraint or bar
Of formal beauty in their choice, could say
The things I saw? Repeat a different way
A hundred times, and what those tortures are
It tells not. Words are lacked. The mind of man
Such horror hates. It shrinks to comprehend
Such slaughterous sights as here around us ran.

If all who in Apulia's fatal land
Bewailed the bloodshed of their violent end
Beneath the merciless Roman sword, - if they
Who died in that long Punic war, which gave
Even of the rings they wore so vast a prey, -
If those who felt the weight of Guiscard's glaive, -
With those who perished in the fatal band
The false Apulians to their fate betrayed,
Whose bones at Ceperano heap, - with all
Alardo's craft at Tagliacozzo made
Without resort of weaponed strife to fall, -
Were gathered in one place and each displayed
The shredded limbs, the ghastly wounds of war,
Nought were it to the dreadful mode I saw
In this ninth chasm.

A man beneath us stood
Whose body like a cantless cask was split.
The staves bulge outward. Through the bursting wood

It pours its contents. So the open slit
That cleft him, fore and hind, from neck to thigh,
Poured out; between his legs his entrails hung.
He thrust his hands his heart and lungs among,
And cried against us, "See Mahomet's pride!
Or see where Ali weeping walks beside,
Cleft down the face in twain from hair to chin.
Scandal or schism has each man sown as I.
For discord are we sliced who walk herein.
A devil waits us in our turn. For while
We stumble in our wounds, with every mile
The torment heals us, till again we reach
The place we were, and with his sword to each
He gives the slitting which we felt before. -
But who are ye who with no falling gore
So calmly view us? Do ye seek delay
To shun the purpose of the guilty way?"
My Master answered, "Death he hath not known,
Nor guilt unpurged the downward path hath shown
To whom I lead, but full experience
To gain, he goeth through evil's last defence
From cycle down to cycle: this is true
As here I stand and speak, who like to you
Have all my deeds behind me."

At this word

Such wonder stirred the trench, that those who heard
A moment of their torment lost, and stayed
Oblivious of their gaping wounds. I made
The count of twice a hundred.

"Thou canst tell

Dolcino, if his waiting place in hell
He hath no haste for, that the Novarese
May win by starving whom they may not seize
By any sword-craft. Let him arm him well
With store of victuals ere the snow make blind
The mountain ways."

So spake Mahomet, the while
He stood with one leg lifted, to beguile
The demon that he moved.

A shade behind,

Noseless, with one ear only, and his throat
Slit open, through the red gash spake, "O thou!
Guiltless, who on the Latian ground ere now
Hast met me, save resemblance lead astray,
Remember Piero, if the backward way,
To reach the sunlight of the world, thy fate
Permit thee, if thy living feet regain
Mine own dear country where the gentle plain
Slopes downward to Vercelli, wilt thou tell
The noblest two in Fano's walls that dwell,
Cassero and Cagnano, that except
Our foresight fail us here, that lord adept
At violence and unfaith shall both betray,
Cast from their barque in Cattolica bay,
Sack-sewn and weighted? He that hath one eye,
And holds that land that one who here doth lie
Had better never in his life have seen,
Will bring them there to treaty, and thereby
So act that caution of Fecara's squalls
Will aid them nought. Such deed there hath not been
In Neptune's sight: he hath more hope who falls
To Argives or to pirates."

I replied,

"Your speech resists me. Show me first aright
Who with thee here laments that bitter sight,
That I may bear thy tale aloft."

He gripped

A comrade by the jaw. "This shade dumb-lipped
Was Curio once, with wagging tongue that lied
To cease the doubt in Cæsar. 'All delay
To men prepared is harmful!' urged he then.
Now walks he round to reach the place again
Where waits the slaughtering demon."

Sick dismay

Was on the face that once so glibly spake,
And tongue slit backward to the throat I saw
That once had gibed the dreadful cast of war.
Now moved he on, his endless turn to take
Prepared for that which did not grant delay.
But one whose either hand was sliced away,

Raised in the dusk the bleeding stumps until
The blood fell backward on his face, and cried
"Forget not Mosca! 'Ere ye counsel, kill;
Death's logic brief will save long argument.
The wrought deed prospers!' - So I urged. Ah me!
It bore a bitter seed for Tuscany."

I answered curtly, "And your race has died."
Whereat as one distraught with pain he went
Lamenting doubly.

Still I watched beside
The moving troops, and here a thing I saw
Divorced from reason. All our natural law
Denies it. Only mine integrity
To write such proofless words gives confidence.
But this I saw, and still in mind I see, -
A headless trunk that walked. Beside his knee
He swung his own head by the hair, as though
He bore a lantern for his feet to go
Unstumbling in the darkness. No pretence
Of explanation mine. What God ordains
The wise man marvels, and the fool explains.
The sharp eyes marked us, and a startled O!
Broke from the lips, and when the trunk below
Came level where we paused, the arm on high
Lifted the head to bring its words more nigh.

"Thou living, who dost view the grievous dead,
Is any doom so great as mine," it said,
"In all Hell's circles? That De Born am I
Who gave my prince the evil counselling
Which caused him, rebel to the elder king,
Against his sire to war. Ahithophel
So worked with David and with Absalom.
Because I parted father and child, in Hell
My root of being finds the brain therefrom
Disparted. So the Eternal Justice wills."

THE numerous people, and the diverse ills
That slit them in a hundred forms, had made
Mine eyes so salted, that awhile I stayed
Content with weeping, till my wiser guide
Reproached me. "Wherefore is thy sight delayed
Amidst the dismal demon-hacked so long?
Thou didst not linger at superior wrong
In higher pits so faintly. Wouldst thou guess
The numbers whom discordant wounds distress,
Consider two and twenty miles complete
The narrowing circuit that we cross. But now
The moon has passed beneath us. Short allow
Remains, before the time conceded ends,
And far beyond this gloom the realm extends
That waits thee."

"Master," I replied, "if thou
Hadst heeded that which drew my gaze, thy feet
Had stayed beside me." But he pressed ahead
The while I answered, that the words I said
Were called behind him as we moved.

"Within
That cavern where I gazed so fixed, I saw
A kinsman who bewailed the dreadful law
That prices in such coin his earthly sin."

My Master answered, "Waste no thought thereon,
Mine eyes observed him whilst thine own were set
Too firmly on De Born to heed. He made
A gesture fierce with hate. They called him here
Geri del Bello."

"O my Guide! the debt
He left of honour, which his partners yet,
Who shared his shame, have venged not, so betrayed
His heart to indignation. More for that
My pity meets him."

While we spake, he led
Across the ridgeway to the final tier
Of ordered suffering. Far beneath us spread,
Hid only by the dimness, wide and Hat,
The last sad cloister of the damned.

If sight
Came slowly in the gloom, it did not hide
The sounds of their lamenting. Every cry
Was like a shaft that pierced me, fledged for flight
With pity. Thousand were the woes that cried
In different accents, till my hands I pressed
Against my ears to still them.

If the ills
Of Valdichiana, when the autumn fills
Its lazars, with Maremma's sick should lie,
And all Sardinia's in one ditch, so high,
So foul, the putrid stench might reach.

We left
The last span of the bridge's long descent
To take the intersecting wall. We went
Left-hand, as always. As we climbed more low
The thick malignant air sufficed to show
How the infallible Justice of God contrives
The doom of those who use their earthly lives
To give the face of truth to falsity.

I think not that &AELIG;gina's ancient woe
More bitter evil in its course could show,
Though groaning in an air so pestilent
All creatures, even the fluttering insect, fell,
Till all of human kind, as sages tell,
Had perished, once again to multiply
From seeds of ants.

Along a trench we went
Where spirits in disordered heaps were thrown
And languished. This upon the belly lay,
That on the back, of him beneath. Alone
Another wriggled down the dismal way.

We went in silence, watching men too sick
To lift their bodies as we came, and heard
Their plaints unceasing. Two there were that leant
Against each other, as two pans are propt
For warming, on the hearth; and each so thick
Was scabbed, that horse-boy never yet so quick

Plied comb the while his master called, as they
Scraped with their nails the itching scales away,
That like the scales of bream around them dropt,
When the knife cleans it.

To the first his word
My guide addressed. "O thou whose nails so fast
Now shred thy mail, and now as pincers work,
If any Latians in this trench are cast
I pray thee tell, and may thy fingers last
Sufficient for thy needs eternally!"
The leper answered, "Latians both are we
Who weep this torment. Tell me whom I see
That so can walk untortured?"

He replied,
"One am I that High Heaven hath sent to guide
This other through the trenches ploughed in Hell.

At that they raised themselves apart, and turned
To gaze upon me. Others near, who learned
The meaning of my Master's words, alike
Their trembling bodies lifted up to see.

My leader's kindness gave the speech to me, -
"Ask that thou wilt," and by this leave I said,
"So that thy memory may not steal away
From our first world for many suns to be,
Let not disgust at thy sin's penalty
Restrain thee from the telling."

He replied,
"I was Arezzo-born, and burned alive
(Albero da Siena's false contrive
Condemned me); not for that for which I died
Ye see me here. There is no doubt I said,
Too lightly, man could raise himself in flight
By arts I knew, and in his foolishness
He willed that I should teach him. This I tried,
And failed, whereon the woud-be Dædalus
Invoked his sire to burn me. None the less
This depth I found, by Minos judged aright,
Who errs not ever, and flung me downward thus

To this tenth blackness, for the alchemy
I practised."

"Surely," to my guide I said,
"There is no people of such vanity,
Not even the French, as are the Sienese."
Whereat the second of the leprous dead
Made answer, "Save the Stricca, who contrived
Such modest spending, or the youth who thrived
On his new cookery of the clove; or they
Who aided Caccia's haste to cast away
Forest and vineyard: - but that thou mayst know
Who thus gibes with thee at the Sienese,
Look closely, that mine altered face may show.
I am the shadow of Capocchio
Who made false metals by mine alchemies.
If whom I think thou art, thyself couldst tell
If false I coined, I coined that falsehood well."

Canto XXX

WHEN Juno's hate, enwrathed for Semele,
Repeated evils on the Theban blood,
Athamas to such madness sank that he,
Who saw his wife approach, each burdened arm
Bearing a son, cried out, "The nets we spread.
We take the lioness and her cubs!" and so
With pitiless claws he dashed the elder dead,
Whereat she leapt, still burdened, to the flood,
And drowned that other, and herself. And when
The Trojans' heavenward pride was cast so low
That king and kingdom ceased, Hecuba then
Saw Polyxena slain, and on the sand
Lay Polydore, and all her misery
Her mournful captive mind refused, and she
Barked like a dog, to such forlorn degree
Had sorrow moved her. But the Theban land
Such furies held not, nor the Trojans met
Such naked hate, as here I saw. There ran
Two shades with rabid working jaws, that bit

As snaps a sow thrust outward from the sty,
The full trough waiting. One bent down, and set
Its teeth behind Capocchio's neck, and so
It dragged him, while his belly rubbed the grit.
Whereat the trembling Arentine began,
"That goblin is Gianni Schicchi. Thus
He mangles - "

 "May that other's teeth forego
Thy neck-joint ever! Grudge thou not to show
Who is she, ere she passes hence."

 He said,

"That female imp, the ancient shade is she
Of Myrrha, who with love flagitious
Approached her father in false garb, as he
Who gnaws Capocchio, aped Donati's dead,
The will by which the priceless mare he won
Dictating in that guise."

 The furious two
Passed onward, mangling as they went, and I
The ill-born shadows more surveyed. Was one
Shaped like a lute, had but his groin begun
A forkless form. The heavy dropsy drew
His lips apart, as those whom fevers burn.

He said, "O ye, no penal fate who earn
Amidst this grimness, turn your eyes to see,
And hearken that which makes my misery
Beyond the eyes' observing. Justice sets
Before my sight the cool fresh rivulets
That Casentino's verdant hills provide
For Arno's fullness. Down the mountain side
They fall for ever in my sight, and so
Contain more torture than this swollen woe
That from my visage wears the flesh. The sight
That gives my frequent sighs a faster flight
Is justly of the place that saw my sin,
Mine own Romena, where the false alloy
I mixed and printed with the Baptist's head,
For which they burnt me. When on earth, I had
All earth's delights my fraudulent wealth could buy.

A drop of water now would make me glad;
But had I Branda's fount, to lave therein,
It would not yield me such exceeding joy
As would the sight of Alessandro dead,
Or Guido in such misery here as I.
One, if the ravening shadows do not lie,
Is here already. Had I strength to move
One inch of journey in a hundred years,
I had been started on the road to prove
So fair a rumour, and behold his tears.
Yea, though eleven miles the circle bends,
And half a mile its crowded breadth extends -
For by their tempting in this sink I lie."

I asked him, "Next thy swollen boundary,
Right-hand, how name ye those unmoving two
That steam like hands in winter bathed?"

He said,

"When first I tumbled in this pot to stew,
So lay they both. They have not raised a head.
I think they will not through eternity.
The nearer is the wife of Potiphar
The other Sinon, that false Greek of Troy.
From burning fever reek they thus."

Too far

His scorn betrayed him. In a fierce annoy
The Trojan smote him with a lifted arm,
The rigid belly like a beaten drum
Resounding.

"Though my heavy limbs subtract
The power of motion, for so foul an act
My arm yet serves me." - So the Brescian said,
And brought it down upon the fevered head.
"It served thee little from a larger harm,
Or wherefore in full manhood didst thou come
Amongst us from the stake? It served, no doubt,
The base alloy to mix, and stamp it out."

The dropsied answered, "That on earth I burnt
Is truth, but say how long thy tongue hath learnt

Such custom? Falsehood was thine earthly skill."

He answered, "If I lied, thy trade could still
Outpace me. Would'st thou chide a lonely lie?
A thousand times thy hand would falsify.
There is no demon here could match the sum
Of thine iniquities."

"Such magnitude
Had thy one falsehood, all the world has spewed
Its indignation on thy name: be that
The heaviest burden of thy guilt."

"Be thine
The thirst that cracks thee, and the putrid filth
By which thou art distended."

"Like a cat
Thy jaw spits fury, as in life; if mine
Be moisture-swollen thirst, no fairer tilth
Ye garner for your gain," the Brescian said.
"The burning fever and the aching head.
I think Narcissus' mirror would not shine
For long unlicked beneath thee."

While they jarred
I paused to hear them, till my Master said,
"A little longer, and thy fixed regard
Will end our friendship."

When his anger showed
So sharply, all with sudden shame I glowed,
And might not answer. On I walked as one
Who dreams and wishes that the dream were done,
So evil turns it while he dreams, and so
Desires and knows not his desire is true.
So walked I in my shame and did not know
My shame forgave me in his thought. I knew
His anger, only in my thought alive,
Until he told me, "Weaker shame than thine
A greater fault would cancel; therefore cease
A grief too weighty. When we next arrive
At any kindred scene, thy mind release

More quickly. Discord in such filth is nought.
The thought to hear it is a vulgar thought."

Canto XXXI

So healed he with the tongue that hurt before,
Like that charmed spear which could the wounds restore
That first it made; and neither spake we more
The while we climbed from out the final pit,
To reach a hollow where nor dark nor day
Was round us. Here a horn above me blew
So loud that thunder to the noise of it
Were weakness. Not so loud Orlando's horn
Called vainly from the rout that cast away
An empire's purpose. Up I looked, and knew
A range of towers confronted, and thereat
I questioned, "Master, say what town is that
So near us?"

"Through the veil of darkness drawn,
The distance mocks thee. Let us haste, that so
The truth be shown," he said, and then - "But no,"
And took me kindly by the hand, - "the worst
Will seem less dreadful, if I show thee first.
They are not towers in a circling wall,
But giants planted round the pit, that all
Show upwards from the navel." As the mist
Thins slowly, by the morning sunlight kissed
Till hidden forms show vaguely, and reshape
Their gradual outlines as the vapour leaves
The obstructed air, the gloom, as near we drew,
Reformed my error with a closer view
More frightful. For the nether pit receives
Their legs and bellies, while the rest doth rise
Like Monteregione's towers, that crown
The wall's full circle. Upwards from the thighs
One monster faced me. Nature found escape
From such creation ere our time, and well
She chose her condemnation. Still Jove's frown
Against them thunders. If the monstrous whale

Its breed continue, or the elephant,
They do not vainly through their bulk rebel
Against the rule of nature. Wits are scant,
And weight is harmless. When they both unite
What is there in mankind that might prevail
To make defence against them?

Like the pine

That stands before St. Peter's, such the sight
His visage showed me. All the rest alike
Was monstrous. Aproned by the bank, he yet
Such stature showed, that three tall Frisians
One on the other, could not thus combine
To reach his hair. The savage mouth began,
Rafel mai amech zabi almi,
To shout in rage toward us. Speech of man
It might not nearer. In full scorn my guide
The meaning of that barren noise supplied,
"His own his accusation. Nimrod he,
Who brought confusion on the tongues we speak;
In vain for converse here your questions seek.
He comprehends our speech no more than we
The sounds he rumbles. Dullard! take thy horn.
On thine own breast it hangs, and yet thy mind
Confuses, that it may not always find
And vent its passion with such blasts."

We went

Left-hand, and pacing thence a cross-bow shot,
A fiercer and more monstrous monument
Appalled me. Who the artist, once who got
Those cords around him, daunts my mind, but so
It had been. His right arm behind his back,
Five times were girt the parts exposed.

"Attack,"

My Master told, "against high Jove he planned,
What time the giants with the gods at war
Affrighted Heaven. Hence the equal law
That binds the arms he lifted. This ye see
Is Ephialtes."

"Master, might there be
Among these shapes the bulk of Briareus?"

"Yea, but far off he stands, and bound is he
Alike to this one, though of face more grim.
But Antæus, who did not war with Zeus,
Is near, and as there are no bonds on him,
He shall convey us down the sink of guilt."

No earthquake sways a massive tower as then
The bulk of Ephialtes, straining, shook
To break that bondage. Dread, that made me look,
So worked that fear alone my life had spilt,
Had not the strong bands cheered me.

On we went

And Antæus reached, five ells of height who showed
Above the edge whereon we walked, although
One half was in the dreadful cave below
To which we journeyed.

"Thou, who once abode,"

My guide addressed him, "in that vale of fate
From which the broken Carthaginians fled,
To Scipio's glory; thou, whose hands have caught
A thousand lions for thine ancient prey;
Thou, whose strong aid, it seems, had likely brought
The strife Titanic to a different day
From that which closed it, - set us down, I pray,
Upon the frozen floor, and be not shy
To help us. Surely, should we further go
For aid to Typhon or to Tizeo,
The hope of larger fame thy name shall miss,
For this man's life resumes on earth, and he
Can lift thy boast anew. I know for this
All creatures long in Hell."

My Master's plea

So wrought, that hasteful were the monster's hands
To lift us. In the grasp that Hercules
Once felt to fearing was he raised, and I
Caught to him, in one bundle held. As seems
The Carisenda to a man that stands
Beneath the leaning side, when overhead
A low cloud darkens, till its bulk he deems
To overweight it, so the Titan showed

To me beneath. By some alternate road
My choice had lain, but ere my doubt was said
He placed us gently on the dreadful bed
Where Judas is devoured with Lucifer,
And having loosed us on the icy plain,
Like a ship's mast he raised himself again.

Canto XXXII

IF words were mine unlike our mortal tongue
In which the beauty of all heights is sung,
I might attempt with greater confidence
The core of my conception here. But whence
Are words for things undreamed? What words are fit
In harsh discordance for the utmost pit?
I have no words, and fear to speak, but yet
It must be.

Muses, by whose art was set
The Theban cincture of strong walls, lead on!
Grant me thy power, as once to Amphion,
That speech for truth interpret.

Here converge
The rocky causeways. In this pit submerge
The vomits of creation. All its weight
Is pressed upon them. Here the miscreate
Lament their own existing. Oh, what curse
Here in the bottom of the Universe
Had lifted, had they been but goats! To me
It seems for men too dreadful.

Down the slope
We started from the Titan's feet, and while
I still gazed backward at the wall, I heard
A cry beneath me, "Heed ye where ye tread
Lest fall thy weight on some grief-weary head
That here lamenteth."

Then I looked, and lo!
No ground I trod, but all the space below
Was glass transparent. Not the underflow
Of Austrian Danube from the weight of snow

Such roof divides. Not Don, alone that lies
Beneath the silence of the frozen skies,
Such mantle wears. Slavonia's lonely height
Had fallen here, or Lucca's mountain white,
And had not cracked it.

As the frogs at night
Sit croaking, with their heads above the stream,
While on the bank the gleaner rests, adream
Of fields she emptied, so the miscreants lay
Frozen in firm ice, so deeply sunk that they
Showed livid through the hard transparency
That bound them, with their heads alone left free,
And chattering jaws that rapped the ice, and made
A noise of storks conversing. More betrayed
Their ceaseless tears the bitter woes they knew, -
Salt tears that froze in falling.

Here were two
So closely brothered in that frozen bed
That face to face the hair of either head
Was mingled, and their hidden features pressed
Each other.

"Tell me, ye that breast to breast
So consort," asked I, "who on earth ye be?"
Whereat they bent their backward necks to see
Who called, and as their faces rose apart
The tears that ever from their eyes would start
The fierce cold hardened at their source, and held
Their eyelids firm as any smith should weld,
Or wood to wood with iron is clamped. Whereat,
Like he-goats angered, both their heads began
To butt the other in their rage. With that
Another near, who did not lift his face,
Whose ears the frost had taken, gave reply,
"Why seek ye, gazing at our woeful case,
To read us? If for aught ye list to know
Those twain, the vale of the Bisenzio
Was theirs, from Count Alberto. From one womb
They came, and search ye all the dreadful doom
Of this Caina where ye stand, not one
Is here more worthy of the frozen pie

In which they serve us. Not that wretch fordone
By Arthur's hand, who pierced him, front and back
And shadow at once; nor he that next doth lie
Beyond me, Mascheroni, - if ye come
From Tuscan hills, my words ye will not lack
To place him; - nor Focaccia. Lest ye try
To vex me with more words, de Pazzi I;
I wait Carlino here, to justify
My lighter guilt."

Of doggish faces, numb
With frozen torture, round our feet there lay
A thousand. Still my shuddering thought recalls,
And shivers ever as the frozen ford
I strive to think not. Was it destiny,
Or chance, or will? My doubt I own, but while
We trod mid-distance of the final mile,
My foot caught sharply one projecting head.
Whereat it raised a weeping voice, and said,
"Why dost thou trample thus the doomed, unless
Thou come designed to deal more bitterness
In hate for Montaperto?"

"Master, stay
One moment here, and any more delay
I will not ask."

My Master paused, and I
To that reviling spirit gave reply,
For still it cursed me, - "Tell me who thou art,
Who thus reproachest?"

"Nay, but be thy part
To tell me first. Who art thou stumbling thus
Through Antenora, on the cheeks of us
Who suffer? Wert thou yet in life, it were
Too much to pardon."

"Nay, I live; but say
The name thou hadst, and I will make thy day
A longer on the earth than else thy share
Of fame continue."

"Nay, ye little know
The words of flattery on this slope of woe.
We lust oblivion only. Get ye gone!

Nor vex me further."

By the after-scalp

I gripped him roughly. "Speak, or every hair
That grows upon thee, from the root I tear,
Before I leave thee on this icy alp."

He answered, "Though the final hair ye pick,
And though my face a thousand times ye kick,
I will not tell you."

In my hand his hair

Was twisted, and an ample tuft was flung
Loose on the ice, he barking out despair
And rage together, when the song he sung
Aroused his neighbour, "Bocca, what thy woe?
Canst thou not chatter with thy jaws as we,
And cease thy barking? What strange fiend supplies
An extra pain?"

I said, "Thy name I know,

And would no more. Accursed, traitorous!
Thy name a byword on the earth shall be;
For I will tell thy treasons."

"He who lies

So near, and talks so glibly, thou canst tell,
And not me only. Thou canst speak it thus, -
'Close-pinned with Bocca in the frozen hell
I saw Duera. There his chattering jaws
Bewail the Frenchman's silver bribe.' If more
They ask, who shiver in the icy claws,
Boccaria lies beyond, whose neck was slit
At Florence: and Soldanire thou canst say
Is not far distant; and Ganelone;
And Tribaldello fails not to deplore
The gates he opened in the night."

We stayed

To hear no further. In short space ahead
We saw two frozen in one hole. As bread
Is gnawed in hunger: as Menalippus
Was chewed by Tydeus: so the upmost head
Gripped with its teeth the neck beneath, and tore
Just where the nape and brain unite. I said,

"O thou, so hard whose bestial hatred gnaws
Thy mate in condemnation, if good cause
Thy rage explain, it were thy gain with us
To share it. Upward I return once more,
And surely as my speech remain, I then
Will give thee justice in the mouths of men."

Canto XXXIII

THE sinner ceased his ghastly meal, and wiped
His jaws upon the victim's hair, and said,
"Thou willest that reluctant words recall
A grief so dire it wrings my heart, before
An utterance forms, but if my speech shall fall
A seed that fruiting backward from the dead
Shall make him whom I tear infamed the more
Among our people, then I gladly weep
To tell thee. How to this sad depth ye came,
Where no man erst has been, nor what thy name
I know, but that familiar speech of thine
I heard, and hailed thee friend and Florentine,
- For I was Ugolino. Him I keep
In this remembrance of an earthly woe,
The arch-priest Ubaldini. Now I tell
Of that which brought us to this depth of Hell,
And why high Justice thus permits that I
Feed here, and shall not starve, and shall not die,
Nor cease my feeding. All I need not say
Of mutual fraud, nor how he snared away
My life, a tale for other tongues, but this,
The cruel fate I found, they well may miss,
It was so secret. In that hole which now
Is called the Dungeon of the Starved I lay,
And watched the narrow slit by night and day,
Until nine moons across its space of sky
Had ended, when the evil dream I knew
That did the curtain of my fate untie.

"It seemed that on the Pisan hills was I,

A gaunt wolf with his weary whelps that ran,
And after came the hounds; and there a man
That cheered them on; the lord of all was he,
This Ubaldini, and before him rode
Gualandi, and Sismondi, and thereby
Lanfranchi; and the hounds, that closer drew,
Were swift and lean and eager. I could see
The wolf among his whelps, that was but I
And my young sons, grow weary, and the hounds
Were tearing at their flanks. I waked to find
The night yet darkened, but the moaning sounds
My sons were making in their sleep for bread
Had roused me. Cruel were the hearer's heart
Who would not weep for that their cries forebode.
If not for this, for what should tears have part?
It was the first day that we were not fed.
The hour recurred. With anxious eyes, and
Of any speech we waited. Now they come
- The steps we know - we heard the echoing
That locked and sealed us from the world: we heard
The steps recede. I had not wept nor stirred.
I watched them weeping till the youngest said,
'Father, what ails thee? Wilt thou speak?' But I
Gazed and not moved, and could not find reply.
And all that day not any word I said,
And all that night, nor any tears I shed,
Till through the bars the morning light anew
Revealed our grief, and in my sons I knew
The aspect of myself, and anguish wrought
Within me, till I gnawed my hands. Whereat
They answered (impulsed by a single thought
That hunger urged me), 'Father, do not stay
Thine hand against us. Shouldst thou take away
The lives we owe thee, right it were, and less
To us the pain, that from the flesh we give
Thy life continue.'

Then I strove subdue
The anguish in me, lest I more distress
The sons beyond myself I loved. That day,
And all the next, in silent pain we lay

On earth too hard to take us. After that
Death came. For when the next sad dawn was dim
Fell Gaddo at my feet, and with one cry,
'O father, wilt thou aid us nought?' he died.
And two days more I watched, and after him,
One after one, beheld them fall and die.
Then, blind with famine, three days more I groped
Around them, till my grief no more denied
The pangs of fasting" - as these words he said,
With hateful eyes upon his murderer's head,
Again he seized it in strong teeth that bit
Hard on the bone. Ah, Pisa! since thy state
Thy neighbours leave, and all vituperate
Who know thee, shall not those two isles, that lie
So near, block Arno at its mouth, and throw
Its waters on thee till the depth of it
Hath drowned the last man in thy walls? For though
Had Ugolino all thy towers betrayed,
It were not right for one man traitorous
His children in their youth to torture thus
To innocent death, thou Thebes of Italy!
And therefore shall their frustrate names remain
In minds of all men where my tale is made.
Ugucione and Bragata they,
Anselm and Gaddo.

On we went, to see
A varied torment. Here the frozen pain
That bowed those others, bends its victims back.
They may not weep. The fount of tears they lack.
For all the hollows of their eyes are filled
With hardened ice. The tears that first they spilled
Are crystal visors to their sight.

To me,
Though cold had calloused all my face by now,
It seemed a wind was passing. To my guide
I questioned, "Master, is not vital heat
Extinguished here? Can utter cold allow
This downward air?"

He answered. "Soon we meet
Its cause, and sight shall tell thee."

Near us cried
A wretch that marked us of the frozen host,
"O souls so cruel that the latest post
Is here assigned ye, will ye break away
The blocks one moment from mine eyes, that stay
The waiting tears?"

We paused, and I replied.
"Then tell us who thou art, and whence thy doom,
And he should well deserve the frozen tomb
Who did not aid thee."

"Alberigo I,
The Jovial Friar, whom Manfred brought to die!
The evil fruit that in my orchard grew
Returns. The figs I gave: the dates I pick."

"Ha!" said I, "hast thou also left the quick
So soon?"

He said, "I know not. We that lie
In Ptolomæa, oft this depth descend
Before our bodies reach their natural end.
For those that like myself to death betray
Their friends, a waiting demon drags away,
Casts to this cistern of our kind, and then
His body takes, and in the ways of men
Controls it, till his time be spent. Behind
Is Brancha d'Oria. If his corse have died,
Who here finds winter, better chance have ye
Than I to tell, who earlier came, but he
Long years has suffered in this ice."

I said,
"I think thou liest. Brancha is not dead.
He lives on earth, and in our mortal way
His body eats and sleeps and warms today."

"Where boils the pitch, ere Michel Zanche came,
Within the Malebranche's ditch," said he,
"This man a demon in his place had left,
And one beside who shared his perfidy
Came likewise ere his time; but reach thy hand
To do the service that my speech can claim."

I heard, but different course my heart had planned
Since horror learnt his name. The ice uncleft
Still blinds him. Rudeness there was courtesy.

Ah, men corrupt from God! Ye Genoese,
Why do ye haste not on your path to these,
And earth seem cleaner? With Romagna's worst,
I found Ser Brancha, for his soul's disease
Ere death who suffers in this place accurst.

Canto XXXIV

THE lifted banners of the King of Hell,"
- My leader roused me from my thought -
"are nigh;
Look therefore." I beheld, as in such sky
As foul mist hides, or murk of night obscures,
A turning windmill loom; and such the gale
Its motions caused, that I, of strength too frail
To meet it longer, shrank behind my guide.

Beneath our feet - but memory fears to tell -
The sinners here contained in Hell's last sewers
Were frozen solid in firm ice, and shone
Like straw in glass; and as we walked thereon
We saw some flat, and some with heads below,
And some pulled backward like a bended bow,
And some were upright.

When we got so near
I needs must see, my leader stepped aside.
He said, "Let fortitude reject thy fear,
For Dis confronts thee."

There I think I died,
Though living. Not the icy blast I met
A living man could face, a dead could feel.
But here speech fails me. Reader, words are nought
To help me further. To thy livelier thought
I leave it.

Breast-deep in the ice was set

The Emperor of the dolorous realm; but yet
So huge he towered that I should seem more fit
With giants to consort, than a giant compare
With one arm only. He, that once so fair
Could walk assured in Heaven, the lordliest there
Beneath his Maker, fills this glacial pit
If by his woe we price his earlier weal,
Or judge his glory by his aspect now,
Well may he fount affliction. For one head
I saw three faces. One was fiery red.
The others slanting from each shoulder rose
To form one crest that shapes creation's woes.
One pallid yellow, one the sable hue
Of those who wander from the tropic land
Wherefrom the sources of the Nile expand.
There were two wings the three foul heads below
Such bird to suit. I never saw such spread
Of ocean canvas to the wind: but these
Were bat-like, plumeless, and the wind they bred,
- They flapped unceasing - caused the glacier freeze
Down which we traversed. With six eyes he wept,
The while a sinner in each mouth he kept,
And chewed, and loosed not. Tears and foam unite
With dribbling blood, that spurts from every bite
Down his three chins. The midmost was not bit
So much as torn. At times his back was flayed
All bare of skin.

"That soul that most endures,
Whose head Apollyon in his mouth hath got,
Whose legs kick outward, is Iscariot:"
My Master told, "of those whose heads may quit
The teeth that chew them, down the swarthier chin
Is Brutus dangling. Mark how silently
He writhes. The comrade of his doom is he
Who shared that treason, Cassius. - But the night
Is rising in the world without, and we
Must hasten. All is seen that lies herein,
And hence depart we."

At his word I put
My arm around him. He with lifted foot

His opening watched, and when the wings were wide
Leapt from the glacier to the tangled side,
And midst the shaggy tufts of frozen hair
The scaly hide descended.

When we came
To pass the swelling of the haunch, my guide
With arduous effort turned, till where his head
Had been before, he placed his feet instead,
And gripped the hair as one that mounts. I thought
That backwards into Hell his path he sought.
But he, hard-panting with that toil, replied,
"Hold fast - be silent - by this only stair
We find Hell's exit."

Thus he climbed to where
An opening gashed the rock, and reaching there
He placed me on the ledge, and warily
Himself stepped after. Here I looked to see
Again the front of Lucifer, and lo!
His legs stuck upward.

Were a man too dense
To understand the point we passed, he still
Might judge the toil before me, to return
To earth's far surface. "Gain thy feet, for ill
The pathway climbs," my guide enjoined, "that hence
Shall take us, as thy weary steps must learn,
And in the outer skies the sun midway
To noon is lifted."

Round I looked, and saw
No palace, but such cleft in earth's deep maw
As likest to a natural dungeon showed,
Ill-floored, ill-lighted.

"Ere this evil road,"
I answered, rising, "leave the deep abyss,
I pray thee tell me, lest my thought should err,
Why upward rise the legs of Lucifer,
And where the icy plain we crossed? and how
The morning shines without, which was but now
To night descending?"

"Dost thou spare to think
Its meaning? Downward through the central sink

We passed. We have not backward climbed to where
I leapt, but holding by the frozen hair
We scaled this maggot of the evil core
To which all weights conclude; and when, midway,
We turned with effort, then beneath us lay
That half the world from which we came, and we
Look upward to that other world of sea
Which those who sail beyond thine hemisphere
Have found, and left uncharted. Standing here
Beneath us is the great dry land that lies
Within the cover of the northern skies,
And centres round the Sacred Mount whereon
The Holiest died. Above us reaches far
The region where the pathless oceans are;
For this side fell from Heaven the Worm of Hell
And all the land drew backward where he fell,
And hid beneath the waters. There is morn
When nightfall closes on thy northern land;
And there our issue, for a stream has worn
A tortuous passage from the outer skies
To this foul pit where Beelzebub lies,
And through the darkness of the toilsome way
Its sound must lead us."

Nothing more we said,
Nor paused for rest, however jagged and rough
And dark the path we climbed, and long enough
For mortal feet to weary. Fast he led:
And I made tireless by that hope ahead
Pursued him upward, till the rocks were rent
With first a sight of Heaven's clear firmament,
And then the earth's clean airs with learnt delight
I breathed, and round me was the beauteous night,
And overhead the stars.

NOTES

Canto I. The opening scene is clearly allegorical, and is capable of various interpretations. The simplest, and most probable, is that the sleek and playful panther is Dante's own city of Florence, the lion is the king of France, threatening the invasion of Italy, and the she-wolf is the

temporal power of the Roman See, the insatiable greed and corruption of which are represented as the radical causes of the condition of Italy.

The poet has realized that, if he would save his moral integrity, he must abandon political ambitions and associations, and revert his mind to the pursuit of literature, and to the idealities of earlier years.

Canto II. This requires little comment. It amplifies the idea of the poet's rescue from imminent spiritual peril by the interposition of Virgil and Beatrice. Virgil obviously represents the love and practice of poetry, as opposed to the snares of political ambition. Beatrice may be held to personate some spiritual quality by those who care for such abstractions. The meaning is clear to anyone of average imagination, and only loses by definition.

Canto III. The inscription over the gate of Hell requires careful reading and intelligent apprehension. The idea is absolutely different from that of eternal torture by an angry Deity. Hell is an inevitable condition of evil. Those who occupy it are self-divorced by their own natures from the light of Heaven. The great majority are not strictly in Hell at all, but rotate in endless repetition of the futility of their wasted lives. They are typified by one who had been offered and refused the Papacy. An alternative choice had brought great dishonour to the Church, and, considering the consequences which may follow from a mere refusal of the responsibilities that life offers, Dante recognizes the justice of the condemnation. The parable of the talent which was wrapped in a napkin reaches the same conclusion.

I anticipate a detail of criticism when I agree that the birds of line 133 may have been falcons, not doves. But the spectacle of pigeons hesitating to come to the call of one who would feed them, and flying downward one at a time, must have been familiar to Dante in the squares of Florence, and it is in some ways a more forcible metaphor, and one which is more familiar to a modern reader. It may be objected that Dante would have compared the lost souls to falcons rather than to doves, but that is not certain, as the success of his metaphors is often gained by sharpness of contrast, underlying a superficial similitude.

Canto IV. This canto asserts the impotence of Hell against those whose lives were blameless. It presents no difficulty.

Canto V. Here we enter the first circle of the places of punishment. The idea is that Hell consists of nine narrowing circles (with some subdivisions), each smaller than the one above it, and each containing sinners of a deeper iniquity, till the centre point is reached,

where Satan is fixed, surrounded by those whose sins have merited "the place of Cain."

There are four outer circles, before the fiery citadel (the city of Dis) is entered, and these are occupied by those whose sins were only against their own bodies. They are not subjected to the indignity of torture by demons, but by hostile elements only.

The first circle contains those who sinned through lack of self-control, and they are now buffeted about by eternal winds, so that when they seek to control themselves they are unable to do so.

Canto VI. The next circle contains the gluttons, whose previous self-indulgence is now balanced by an appropriate discomfort.

Canto VII. In the third circle, the avaricious and the wasteful find the same doom in the futility of abortive toil. Dante cannot recognize any of the lost in this section: they have degraded themselves until their features have become indistinct and blurred from any human likeness.

This is the last of the outer circles, and the edge of the slough which divides it from the city of Dis is occupied by the muddled shades of those who were once sullen, and ungrateful for the light and air, which they received from the free bounty of God.

Canto VIII. As the adventurers are ferried over the half-liquid moat, they observe others of those who suffer from the unrestrained indulgence of evil temper, this being represented as the worst form of the various incontinences which these outer circles contain.

Here, at the gates of Dis, we first encounter the demons that people Hell. The sins of weakness are passed, and we meet evil in active assertion and rebellion against the Deity.

Canto IX. The stubborn, though useless, opposition of the demons to the entrance of Virgil and Dante shows that they are approaching the abodes of evil in more malignant and aggressive forms than have been encountered previously.

Canto X. Here are those whose fault is no more than that they lived in prideful contempt of the faith and discipline of religion. They are innocent of the baser sins which will be ultimately encountered, but they are within the circle of burning because their sin was spiritual, not merely carnal, as were those of the previous sinners.

Canto XI. Here we approach to those who were not merely infidel through arrogance, but from baser impulses, and the stench of their wickedness is such that it cannot be quickly faced. Virgil uses the opportunity to explain the distinctions of human guilt that are

recognized in the divisions of Hell. We have passed the sins of incontinence. We are entering the outer circles of Dis in which the sins of violence are punished. These are subject to subdivision in three circlets, as they are committed by men against their fellow men, their own bodies, or God.

In a farther depth we shall find those who have sinned, not by violence, but by fraud, and they will be subdivided in circular trenches, as their frauds were perpetrated against strangers, those with whom they were connected in some relation of confidence, or those to whom they had direct obligations of loyalty - so that all traitors are in the ultimate depth of Hell.

Canto XII. The adventurers now descend to view the punishment of those who have committed violence against their fellow men, the blind and brutal violence of the Minotaur typifying the minds of such criminals. The ruined wall shows (as is seen again in still lower circles) that Christ had penetrated to the core of Hell, and that those whom He released included sinners from the foulest circles. Here the violent suffer appropriately in boiling blood, graduated according to their guilt.

Canto XIII. The penalty of those who have done violence to their own bodies is as logical as that which falls upon those who do violence to others.

Cantos XV-XVI. Here, in a startling conjunction, are those whose violence is directed against God the sodomites and the money-lenders. There is no question of condemning only those who charged an excessive rate of interest. Dante holds the deliberate opinion that the charging of interest for the use of money is morally indefensible, and a radical evil of our civilization. It is commonly said that he would have modified this view, could he have foreseen modern industrial developments. I can find no reason at all to take this view. On the contrary, I think he would regard them as having demonstrated the truth of the warning which he gave to the world.

Canto XVII. Notice the useless cunning with which the money-lenders attempt to cheat their doom by gathering on the extreme edge of their place of punishment - and so congregating upon the very edge of the final depth, where the fraudulent suffer.

Cantos XVIII-XXXI. The fraudulent are divided among ten circular trenches, each lower and smaller than the previous one, and these are bisected by bridges of rock that slope down to the central pit, on which they converge. It is therefore possible to go straight down to the

centre by one of these causeways, crossing the ten trenches in succession, or to turn aside as each trench is passed, and continue along the circular wall that divides it from the next one, turning inward again when the next of the converging bridges is reached. The ten trenches contain

- (1) Panderers, and betrayers of women.
- (2) Those who deceive by flattery.
- (3) Those who enrich themselves under the cloak of religious service.
- (4) Sorcerers, and all who make gain from the credulity of their fellows.
- (5) Barterers, that is, those who corrupt justice, regarding public office as a means of extorting bribes, and using other illicit means for their own enrichment.
- (6) Hypocrites, who make false professions of religion, and betray its precepts.
- (7) Thieves and cheats.
- (8) Tricksters, who deceive those in whom they had deliberately established confidence.
- (9) Those who with cunning words promote strife or discord.
- (10) Coiners, forgers, and their like.

Cantos XXXII-XXXIII. The final pit, through which the poet and his guide must pass to ascend by the opposite way to the Southern Hemisphere and the mountain of Purgatory, contains the sinners who have betrayed those to whom they were under an obligation of loyalty, this being the lowest possibility of human baseness. Dante may have meant to imply that Ugolino gnawed the dead bodies of his children before he died, but he is not clear, and I have repeated the ambiguity.

The End

The Purgatorio
From the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri

Translated by S. Fowler Wright

Published by: Oliver And Boyd
Edinburgh, Tweeddale Court. London:

98 Great Russell Street.

Printed by:

Robert Cunningham & Sons Ltd., Alva

The Purgatorio

Inside Front Cover: Mr Sydney Fowler Wright's metrical version of Dante's *Inferno* received high praise when it was published in 1928. His *Purgatorio* is written on the same plan, and presents what to many is the most attractive part of the *Divine Comedy* in the form of a readable English poem.

Besides being a poet of some distinction, Mr. Fowler Wright has also an established reputation as a novelist, biographer and essayist, and his stories of the Mildew gang, published under the name of Sydney Fowler, will be familiar to many readers.

(10/6 net)

It is now twenty-five years since I published a translation of the *Inferno*, which was received with at least as much favour as it deserved, and has long been out of print. The present translation of the *Purgatorio* was made at the same time and on the same principles, as was also the *Paradiso*, which I hope may yet be published. Meantime, for the benefit of such readers as do not know my *Inferno*, I repeat below part of the original preface which sufficiently explains what I have tried to do.

There are at least three obstacles to an English translation of Dante which shall be at once worthy and popular. First of all there is the initial and almost insuperable difficulty of translating poetry of any kind from or into any language whatsoever. Second, there is a special obstacle arising from the form in which the *Divine Comedy* was composed, hendecasyllabic *terza rima*, which cannot be successfully imitated in English. Third, there is the fact that a student of Dante is confronted by such a massed accretion of commentary that his approach to the poem is almost forced toward the pedantic rather than the poetic. Here I am tempted to say that my first qualification for this undertaking is that, while I have some knowledge of European poetry, and some practice in its composition, I make no claim whatever to Italian scholarship.

I conclude that Dante would certainly not have selected for an English poem the *terza rima* in which the *Divine Comedy* is written, but

that he would, with equal certainty, have selected the decasyllabic line, which is the finest and most flexible of which our language is capable. This line can be used with equal success for blank and for rhymed verse. My decision (which must be justified, if at all, by the result) was to use it, introducing rhyme with an irregular freedom, but to endeavour to reach a quality of verse which would be so far independent of this subordinate feature that its irregularity, or even occasional absence, would be unobtrusive to the reader's mind.

Having selected a form in which I hoped to be able to move with sufficient freedom, and which, in English, is best adapted to the spirit of the poem, I had to face the larger questions of formal and spiritual fidelity. In regard to these I recognize two primary obligations: first, I regard it as inexcusable to introduce any word or phrase which discolours the meaning of the original, or deviates widely from it; second, I am bound to present the substance of the poem with such verbal beauty as I am capable of constructing, even though an adjective be omitted or added in the process, or some non-essential order of narration be changed to obtain it. This last freedom of rendering is not merely a translator's right, it is a clear duty, because the directness and vigour of the original cannot be reproduced by any verbal literality, and it is of the first importance that he inspire the poem with a new vitality.

My own approach having been poetic rather than pedantic, I have concerned myself very little with the subtleties of disputed words *unless* some fundamental question of spiritual interpretation be dependent thereon. Since notes and references are so freely available in many excellent editions and commentaries, I have not included any explanatory matter.

Some knowledge of the conditions of Europe, social, political, and intellectual, as Dante knew them, some knowledge of the corruptions of Church and State, and of the civil discords which distracted his native Florence, and prevailed in most of the cities of Northern Italy, may be essential to an understanding of the poem; a more detailed knowledge will add greatly to the enjoyment of many passages in it; but, finally, the Divine Comedy must stand or fall by its internal vitality, and it may gain more than it loses by being presented independently of the almost unbelievable accretions of disputation and commentary which have been piled upon it.

The cosmographical idea on which the poem is founded is extremely simple. The earth is a fixed point in the centre of the

Universe. The northern hemisphere is inhabited by the race of Adam. Purgatory is an isolated mountain in the seas of the southern hemisphere, which was unexplored at the time at which the poem was written. The seven Heavens extended, one beyond the other, above the earth on every side, the seventh being infinite in extent. Hell is a central core of evil in the earth's interior.

Metaphorically, Dante represents himself as being entangled in the corruption of Florentine politics, and restrained from their temptations by his love of literature (Virgil) and by his memory of Beatrice, by which influences he is led through and out of this central Hell to the ultimate Heaven.

It would be absurd to suppose that Dante believed in this Hell of his imagination as a physical fact. It would have been contrary to the logic of this intellect to suppose that he could discover its locality, or that of a material Purgatory, by his own intuition; nor, had he intended his readers to regard it otherwise than allegorically, would he have peopled it with fabled monsters such as Minos, Cerberus. and the Minotaur; or with demons of Persian, and centaurs of Greek, mythology.

He drew widely and impartially from every source of human imagination. He faced the mystery of evil without flinching. He saw that good and evil are inevitable and everlasting, as long as life be free-willed and finite and recognizing this, he asserted confidently the divine supremacy of love, and its continual conquest, so that the whole conception becomes one magnificent metaphor of the preponderance of good and its eternal triumph, the residuum of evil being continually chased down and pressed into its central core, while the surrounding Heavens extend upwards, each of a larger orbit, and of a greater holiness than the one below, till the ultimate bliss of the seventh Heaven extends into infinity, so that even the vast extent of the six Heavens below is a triviality in comparison.

It has been said that the latter parts of the poem are of less general interest than the first, the Purgatorio being encumbered with a dead philosophy, and the Paradiso rendered monotonous by the fact that Dante had nothing but light and colour with which to build the Heavens of his imagination.

I venture to challenge these opinions. To me, the power and the imagination of the poem rise as it proceeds. I hope to have justified this assertion; and, should I have failed, should still hold that the fault is mine, and not that of the greater poet.

Certainly, he would not himself have given the place of honour to the Inferno, and if we consider it separately, we should not forget that the path through Hell is only a means of approach to a clearer atmosphere where his art

Reviving from that depth where beauty dies

Purgatorio, Canto I

can occupy itself with better things, till it culminates in the vision of the ultimate triumph of the Divine Love:

*For all the earth
That yearned for Heaven, and all the Heaven that bent
Toward it, separate by the gulf of sin,
Love bridges at last, and ye behold herein
The bridal joys of their so long desire.
Ye see the path God's suffering paved with fire;
And Christ comes down it.*

Paradiso, Canto XXIII

The Purgatorio

CANTO I

At last my barque to cross no pitiless sea
Puts outward. Long the course before me lies;
But here are softer winds, and loftier skies,
And friendlier waters. O Calliope!
Exalt me now, for here are heights beyond
The fore-conception of the dismal pond
Where last I journeyed. All the art I bring,
Reviving from that depth where beauty dies,
Can scarce contrive the second realm to sing
Where the cleansed soul its final worth attains,
And wins ascent to Heaven. O sacred Nine!
To my weak words your songful strains combine
Which once the Magpie-minstrels heard, with pains
That dared to hope no pardon.

All the east

Was sapphire, deepening in the lucid air
To earth's horizon. Love's ambassador
With silver radiance made the Pisces dim,
Her regal escort. Think'st thou not, to him
So lately climbed from that dense atmosphere
Which choked his breathing, and his sight had blurred,
It seemed not earth but final Heaven were here?

I looked to southward, and the gleaming Cross
No eyes had gladdened since our parents' loss
Was splendour. All the wide sky banqueted
In that soft light. O widow North! debarred
Of so much beauty. Then I turned regard
To where the chariot of the northern skies
Had sunk already, when before us showed
A man so reverend in his age, so wise
In aspect, that it had not seemed too hard
With filial fear to serve him. Grizzled-grey
The hair that on his breast and shoulders lay;
And so the sacred lights reflected glowed
Of those four stars from off his face, it seemed
As though the sun's full glory backward gleamed.
'Who are ye,' shaking back his locks, he cried,
'Who thus escape the eternal dungeon? How
The river stemmed ye? Who was found for guide?
How came ye through the infernal night that now
Hath closed that vale for ever? Doth yet the abyss
Revolt against us? Or is it shown in this
That Heaven revokes its own decrees, and gives
Its aid to Hell's convicted fugitives?'

My Guide's firm hand was on me, and he spake
And signed me reverence on my knees to make,
Before he answered: 'Not unpiloted
We came, for One that in the Holiest lives
Commanded that this living man be led
From out such maze as else his end had meant,
By this sole rescue left. Were long to tell
The ways we traversed through the pits of hell.
Now must I show him those whose sins repent

In willing penance underneath thy care.
The virtue from the Utmost Heights derives
Which gave me power to guide him. Hence my prayer
Is bold to urge his freedom. Liberty
He seeks, and suffers. Those who gave their lives,
As thou didst once, no more constraining plea
Can hearken. In Utica, death for thee
Was not too bitter, nor thy garb of flesh
(That in God's Judgment shall outshine afresh)
Too dear to barter in such cause. We break
Eternal laws in nothing. For he yet lives;
And I no leave from condemnation take,
For Minos binds me not. My freedom lies
Where dwells thy Marcia, whose imploring eyes
Look up for thy remembrance. For her sake
Give favour. Grant thy seven wards we see,
And I will thank thee for thy words, if we
Who keep that circle are not held too low
For thy regarding.'

He replied: 'So fond
My thought to Marcia when on earth we dwelt
That all things that she willed, my love to show,
I gave her gladly. Now she stays beyond
The stream of condemnation, all I felt
Is stilled within me; Heavenly law compelled
This severance when I left the drear abode.
But since your right to this infrequent road
A high Madonna of the Heavens confers,
You need not flatter, for your course is held
Beyond my verdict. Go - but this regard;
The man is mortal, and the course is hard
For such to traverse. Thou shalt cleanse away
The filth of hell-fumes that his visage blurs,
And with a smooth rush gird him. Wrong it were
To face the Angel of the souls that dwell
In Paradise, the while the fogs of hell
Yet blind them. Round this isle, on every side,
Even where the tide's full force, with naught to stay,
Sweeps upward, osiers in an oozy bed
Grow thickly. (Nothing else is rooted there,

Nor could be. Naught that shooteth leaves should dare,
Nor aught that hardens into wood.) The tide
They thwart by yielding. Thither haste, nor try
To here return, for here ye go not by.
The sun, that nearly to the dawn is due
Will show the easier slope to take.'

He went

And we, reluctant, left the steep descent
As one who wanders from the path he knew,
And counts each backward step a loss the more
To find it. Now the dawn advancing slew
Upon the rear of twilight where it fled,
And we, yet far, from higher ground could see
The shimmering of the dim, disclosing sea;
Till came we in a shady place to tread
Where still the sunlight had not chased the dew,
And here my Master bent with hands outspread
On the wet grass, and I, his purpose guessed,
Tendered my face, that all the sights of hell
With tears had streaked, and pestilent mists had stained,
And he unveiled me, till no trace remained
Of that distortion. Then we came to where
The barren beaches met the waters, bare
Of any traffic of returning men;
And he, obedient to the high behest,
A lowly rush to gird me pulled, and then
I watched a marvel. Where he plucked there came
Another like it, and their count the same.

CANTO II

The sun which darkened on Jerusalem
Was dawning here, while night from Ganges came,
Bearing the equal scales she casts away
When, in the late year, she outlasts the day.
Now from the fair Aurora's cheeks had fled
The youthful evidence of white and red,
Their beauty conquered, while we gazed at them
By age's mellower sign of tawny flame.

Still by the bare seashore we stayed, as they
Who travel in their thoughts, before the way
Their feet attempt, till, as the warrior star
Goes redly in the west above the sea,
When vapours thicken, so I watched afar
(God grant me yet once more that sight to see!)
A light so swiftly move, no earthly flight
Could equal. Once my Guide a glance I gave,
And looked back instant, but a larger light
Confronted. On each side a shape of white
Was forming, and emerging from below
A third shone later. Naught my guide would show,
Until the Angel's lifted wings were clear,
Then cried he to me 'Bend thy knees, and praise!
The Angel of the Eternal God is here.
For thou dost enter to the loftier sphere
Where of such kind He makes His ministers.
Behold how he rejects of sail or oar
The aid to use, but from the distant shore
With ever-youthful plumes he cleaves the air,
That do not moult, nor age as mortal hair.'

Thereat I bent, and looked again, and found
That my reluctant eyes desired the ground
And shrank that glory. But the Angel neared:
Beneath his feet a flying boat, that cleared
The waves so lightly that it scarce displaced
A ripple on the shining path it traced.
Upon the poop he stood. His wings divine
Impelled its passage, and his looks benign
Where on a hundred souls that there I knew,
As with one voice they sang: '*In exitu
Israel de Aegypto.*' With the sign
Most holy, each he blessed, as each ashore
Stept from the boat; and backward course he bore,
Another load to find.

The multitude,
So left, looked round them with strange eyes, as they
Who dream they find an unfamiliar morn,
In scenes that not their waking eyes have viewed,

Wondrous. Behind their backs the breaking day
Had broadened, and the rout of Capricorn
The sun's swift arrows in mid-heaven had won.
Their glances found us. 'If ye know,' they said,
'The upward way by which our feet should tread,
Wilt lead us?'

Virgil answered them: 'Ye deem
We hold acquainted paths, but strange are we,
Even as yourselves. The hard ascent will seem
To us but pastime, from such dark degree
We climb.'

The spirits clustered round, and saw
My body breathing, and the outraged law
Confused their minds, and like the multitude
That crowd, uncaring on whose feet they tread,
The while the olived herald's news is read,
So came they, through the wonder that they viewed
Forgetful of their cleansing need.

And one
Approached me in a mood so arduous
That thrice to grasp its form, where form was none
(O form unsubstanced of the empty dead!)
Mine arms I lifted, and relaxed. As thus
I reached and wondered, with a smile the shade,
Retreated from me, and a sign it made
To hold me backward. 'Nay, desist,' it said,
'I pray thee', and the voice a memory stirred.
Whereat I answered: 'Nay, but speak, I pray!'
It said: 'When breathed I mortal life I heard
Thy voice with pleasure: therefore praise I now
Again to hear it. But I fail to see
Why pause be needed. Wilt thou not with me
The path continue?'

'O my Casella,'
I said, 'I journey to the world you left.
But tell me why, of mortal days bereft
So long time sooner. here defrauded still
You linger?'

He replied: 'No ill design
Hath held me. He who taketh whom he will

Hath justly others' larger claims than mine
Regarded, and deferred me, though I oft
Have pled for passage. But I came today
Because the three months of the Jubilee
A peaceful passage for all souls hath bought
That there desire it. So the place I sought
Where Tiber's waters meet the salter sea,
And he received me in his barque.

'For there,
Forever gathering, all dead souls repair,
Except the sad descent to Acheron
Their sins have purchased. There again have gone
His wings of mercy.'

'If the later laws,'
I answered, 'that the ransomed shades obey
Will sanction, gladly would I hear once more
Thy gift of song, that in the far-away
Remembered leisures raptured all my soul,
Or soothed its grieving. Couldst thou still console
A body wearied, and a mind that wars
With darkest recollections?'

He thereat
Commenced so sweetly on the canzonet
'Love in the kingdom of my mind confers'
That in mine ears its cadence lingers yet,
And not I only, but my gentle Guide,
And all the ransomed souls that grouped beside,
Were held in rapture.

On their feeding ground
Hast seen how quarrelsome doves their feuds forget,
And quieten to the scattering tares? Hast seen,
If any sound arise, or motion stir,
How with one lift their sudden wings appear,
Their hunger conquered by the sharper fear?
So now, forthright, another mood we found,
When came that venerable guide, and said,
In sharp reproof: 'Why pause ye here? What mean
- O sluggards on the path to holiness! -
This negligence, this hasteless pace to shed
The stainful vestures that your faults confess,

Which blinds ye from the presence of God?'

With speed

Thereat, as those in too much haste to heed
Their path of flight, I saw this company
Attempt the ascent; nor any less were we
Stirred by that chiding voice precipitate.

CANTO III

So fled they up their natural path; but I,
Who could not lightly from my mind abate
My conscious needing of my Master's aid,
Drew closer to his side. Who else but he
Could lead me? What my weaker steps rely,
If he were failure? Self-reproached he seemed
Beyond my concept. Slightest fault is great
To one pure-posed. When his feet forebore
The haste unseemly that his mind betrayed,
- Haste that doth every human act degrade -
My mind was quieted by his peace, and grew
Conscious and eager for that height anew
That Heavenward rose.

The sun, that mounted red
Behind our backs, my shadow lengthened spread
Upon the rising steep. With startled dread
I saw it lonely, and too quickly deemed
My Guide had left me as I pressed ahead,
And turned to find him near my side.

He said:

'Why dost thou doubt? The shadow, once that fell
Before me as I walked, can fall no more,
Since that which cast it at Brundusium
(But since to Naples moved) I laid aside.
Yet naught that should perplex thy mind I tell,
Who knowest that Heavens on Heavens in circles wide
Include the Heavens below, which do not hide
Nor interrupt their rays. High Power ordains
That our unsubstantiated shades must still succumb
To mortal weakness. Cold of falling rains,
Heats, wounds, disease, with all their varying pains,

Can still torment us, as thyself hast seen.
But how the Omnipotent brings such ends to be
Is hidden, and foolish in his thoughts is he
Who deems that mortal reason may discern
The trackless, infinite ways; or modes may learn
By which Three Persons in one Substance act.
Content ye with inexplicable fact.
For were all reason by our race possest
God had not lain a child on Mary's breast;
Nor had men yearned in vain that Light to see
Whose absence made their grief eternally. -
I speak of Plato and Aristotle,
And numerous others that thyself beheld.'

Then, by the thought perturbed, he sank his head,
And walked in silence.

Now we came to where
The mountain from its steep foundation swelled
So sheerly that our willing feet could find
No further footing. Like an easy stair
Between Leric rise and Turbia
Their broken desolate heights in this compare.
My master needs must pause. 'Now where,' he said,
'Is access here? For gentler slopes, inclined
For men unpinioned, go we left or right?'
And while he bent his head, with thoughtful mind
Seeking resolve, and I that hopeless height
Surveyed, a crowd of souls advanced to sight
From leftward. But they came with feet so slow
They scanty moved the while I watched.

'Behold,

O Master,' spake I, 'if thou canst not tell
The advancing way, are others here who well
May help us.'

Then my Master smiled, and said:
'Thy doubt was needless, yet we best may go
To meet them faster than their pace. Do thou
Meantime reject a baseless fear.'

So slight
Their motion that a thousand yards we trod

And still a practised hand a stone could throw
No further distant than they seemed, who then
Drew sideward to the cliffs, and grouped as men
Who doubted all the path they came, and now
With undecided glances halt. My Guide
Hailed them. 'O ye that in the grace of God,
And in the peace of His election died,
I charge ye by that peace that here ye show
The upward path - the more of time we know,
The more to lose it irks us.'

They thereat,

As sheep that timorous leave the fold, or stand
Unsure, with drooping heads and downcast eyes,
Issuing by ones and twos (and if the first
Should pause, they bunch behind, not anywise
Attempting passage, nor to understand
The cause that stays them), so this fortunate band
Opposed us in a meek simplicity,
Not abject in its mien; but when they saw
My shadow blot the mountain-side, they drew
A little back, and those behind (who knew
No cause) did likewise, till my Leader said:
'Unasked, I tell ye. This that here ye see
Is human, and his body yet may flaw
The light's advance. But marvel not for this.
If one shall with you move who is not dead,
And enter living to the heights of bliss,
It is by virtue from those heights bestowed.'
To which they answered: 'Then the way ye came
Return before us', and reversed our road
With motions of their hands.

But one man cried:

'Whoe'er you be, regard me. If my name
Were onetime known in that left world, I pray
That now thou wilt recall it.'

I thereat

Looked closely. One of gentle mien I saw,
And blond, and tall. A sword, before he died,
Had cleft an eyebrow. When I could but say,
Humbly, I had not seen him, he replied

(Showing a wound that broke his breast): 'See that.'
- Smiling - 'I am Manfredi. I am he,
Costanza's grandson, and my daughter she
Whose children rule today in Sicily
And Aragon. I pray thee her to tell
That though beneath the Church's curse I fell,
Yet, when these mortal wounds I felt, I gave
My soul to Him who hath the power to save.
I was not guiltless; but the sins I did,
They could not from the arms of God forbid:
The arms of Infinite Good, that reach so wide
That none who seeks them shall be closed outside.

'If he, Costanza's priest, this truth had read
With understanding in the Writ Divine,
He had not then, by Clement's urging led,
So dealt with those rain-beaten bones of mine
That now the homeless winds consort, beside
Garigliano's desert banks, that lie
Beyond the lands I lost. Those bones he bore
In ritual darkness excommunicate
To that dishonour. But the hope denied
Still lives. Before such curse Love Crucified,
The Eternal Love, is not so lost but still
The shadow of hope is dimly seen. Yet those
Who die repentant but unreconciled
Must wait delayed without the Sacred Hill
For thirty times the space of years that saw
The fault of their presumption unsubdued;
Unless the assault of prayers importunate
Be heard in Heaven, and their doom abate.

'I would that thou shouldst tell my dear-loved child
The nature of this interdict that she
Should mourn no longer that the Church's feud
Expelled me from the holiest rites. - But say
Still potent are the living lips that pray.'

CANTO IV

We know that when the soul doth concentrate,
At pleasure's impulse, or the call of pain,
Upon one object, or the exercise
Of one roused function, all beside abate
Their clamour at this urge importunate.
Refuting the Manichaeian falsity
That plural are the souls our frames contain;
And therefore when assault of sight or sound
Invades, and wins the soul's surrender thus,
To all besides it grows oblivious.
Yet sight or hearing is not soul: for free
The soul remains, and these it doth constrain
Or else release to serve it.

Thus I found

That, while I wondered at Manfredi's word,
My mind, in marvel at the things I heard,
Perceived not that the sun three hours had left
The earth's horizon, till the souls around
Cried with one voice: 'The place ye seek is here.'

I think that with a single fork of thorns
A husbandman would close a wider cleft
That gaps the boundary of the vines, than that
Which here they showed. San Leo's fortified height
And Noli's steep descent a man may tread
With feet unaided, or the crest attain
Of Bismantova, but the peaks ahead
That faced us now, must very wings require,
- The wings, at least, of hot and swift desire
To follow closely where my Master led.
We left these gentle guiding souls; we clomb
With foot and hand the riven rocks between,
A path so narrow that the walls would brush
At once both shoulders, till we came to where
The gullet ended, and the ultimate dome
Of the precipitous mount beyond our sight
Aspired to Heaven. When this new height was seen,
I asked my Master: 'Turn we left or right?'
He answered: 'Neither. Do not shirk nor fail.
We go straight upward; till some Guide appear

More competent than I.'
I could but lean,
Panting, against a slope that rose more sheer
Than would a line from middle quadrant drawn
To reach the centre. 'Father,' I began,
'Kind father, turn thou; here I needs must stay.
Thou wilt not leave me thus?' He answered: 'Nay,
My son, take courage. Will thy strength avail
To drag thee there?' And with a pointing hand
He showed a terrace that aloft was seen
Girdling the mountain. By his words inspired,
I strove anew, with sinews toiled and tired,
To crawl behind him, till that cincture lay
Beneath our feet that trod it.

Here we sat,
And eastward turned our downward eyes to gaze
Upon the vanquished path; for conquered ill
Is pleasant to regard. From off the flat
And reed-grown shore, and mountainous slope, I raised
Mine eyes toward the morning light, amazed,
Perceiving that the sun's assailing rays
From leftward came. My poet-guide observed
My mute bewilderment. The sun's bright car
To northern heaven its shining circuit curved.

He told me: 'If, beside the lordlier star
That lights the earth above, and then below,
Castor and Pollux moved in company,
Then wouldst thou see the Zodiac's golden bow
Lie closer to the Bears; its ancient way
Not changing therefor. Rouse thy mind to see
The simple solving of this mystery;
And think of Zion as the mount that stands
So opposite, that round us here expands
Another hemisphere that spreads to meet
The same horizon; and the heavenly street,
Where Phaeton's chariot fell, must hold its way
To right of Zion, and to leftward here.'

'Master,' I answered, 'never yet so clear

My mind perceived it. That dividing line
By some men called Equator, severing sheer
The summer from the winter hemisphere,
Is now our north horizon bound, as far
In distance as the Hebrews once beheld,
Gazing to southward. . . But I pray thee tell
How far we yet must climb. These heights exceed
My furthest gaze.'

He answered: 'Heed thou this.
The mount is hard. But though at first it swelled
So steeply, yet its earlier ills decline
With each advancing step, until the ascent
Will easeful grow as doth a boat descend
A stream's smooth current. When this ease is thine,
At once the summit and thy rest are near.'

This thing he pledged me, and no more would say;
And in the silence, close beside the way,
Another voice we heard: 'Perchance a need
Of earlier rest will be.' We turned to heed.

Left was a slab of upward stone, and here
We looked, and loitered in its shade we found
An indolent-seeming group, and on the ground
Was seated one with arms his knees around,
And head that bowed upon them 'Lord,' I said,
'He loungeth lazier than his sister Sloth '
Thereat the figure slightly raised its head
From off the thigh's support, more to regard
Our own approach, and answered: 'Strong art thou.
Go upward.' But the lifted face I knew,
And though I panted yet, my feet unloth
Made haste to reach him.

'Nay, Belacqua, now
I grieve thy death no more,' I made reply,
'But tell me, wait'st thou here how long, and why?
Is escort needed? Or doth ease retard,
- The old mode enduring still?'

And he to me:
'Brother, what use to ask? God's angel sits

To guard the portal. Would he let me in?
For those who drift through unrepentant days
Will find that here an equal law delays
Their upward passage - save that prayer remits
Some portion of the wasted years, that else
I now must balance with the like delay -
Prayer surgent from a heart God's grace inspires,
For else the wingless thought in mounting tires,
And no sound reaches through the Heavenly choirs '

But, while he drawled his hasteless speech, my Guide
Had turned once more to breast the mountain-side,
And called me: 'Come! Behold, the mounting sun
Hath reached mid-heaven, and half its course is run;
And on the horizon-line, beyond our sight,
Morocco darkens at the feet of night.'

CANTO V

Following my Leader's steps, I left behind
That slothful band, when one that watched me cried,
With pointed finger at myself 'Doth mind
How he to rearward blocks the light? Methinks
He might be living!'

Then I turned and eyed
A group awake with wonder, while they viewed
My body's shadow on the slope. But he,
My Master, spake with sharp reproof: 'Why so
Doth all delay thee? Let their whispering be.
Wilt thou regard their talk, or come with me?
Strong towers unmoved by wandering winds remain,
But vacillant minds, where thought by thought is slain,
Are futile in their ends.'

To this rebuke
What answer could I give, except 'I come',
And with such colour, though the lips be dumb,
As wins forgiveness?

Where a path transgressed
Some space before us, while we spake, there showed
Another band that on their upward road

Sang *Miserere* verse by verse, but when
They saw me in the wise of earthly men,
They changed their word, and like a raven's croak
A long-drawn *Oh!* came hoarsely, while there broke
Two spirits from the band, that herald-wise
Approached us and besought: 'Disclose the state
Of thine invasion here.' My Guide replied:
'Return to those that sent ye. If their eyes
Observed his shadow, say he hath not died
Who here walks with me. Mortal evident frame
He yet inhabits. Let their thoughts abate
No honour therefor: that they grant today,
His service to themselves may soon repay.'

I have not seen shot stars at midnight fall,
Nor lightnings that ignited clouds display
In August sunsets, with such speed, as now
These spirits to their band returned; and all
Their comrades with them wheeled, and came, as though
A herd of horses galloped unreined, unrid,
Loose-maned upon us.

My Master spake: 'Do thou
Attend, but pause not. All these people throng
With one petition.'

'Soul, who yet dost know
The mortal members that thy birth supplied
To work thy pleasure, turn thy steps aside
Awhile to hear us.' So they wailed. 'Survey
If here be those familiar, that thy word
May take good tidings to our earthly kin.
Alas! Dost thou not pity? Hast thou not heard?
Wilt thou not pause? For in the throes of sin
By violence died we. Yet the light Divine
In that last hour redeemed us, that we died
Pardoning and pardoned; pregnant of desire
To reach the Love that saved us.'

Down their line
I looked intently, yet I could but say:
'I know not any. What your hearts require,
Speak freely. By the peace I seek, I swear

I will not fail to help you.'

One began:

'We do not ask thine oath, but trust thee more
Of kindness, if the power be thine. And I,
Who speak thee first, beseech, that if thine eyes
Behold once more the pleasant vale that lies
Between Romagna and King Carlo's land,
Be fervent for me in thy prayers, for there
I saw the light in Fano; but the gore
That welled from out my wounds, in Padua ran.
Too late I journeyed westward, where I planned
My greater safety. That D'Este did,
Whom wrath made blind to justice. Had I fled
Toward La Mira when pursuit was nigh,
It may be that today I were not dead,
Who died at Oriaco. There I ran
For succour to the marsh, but had not hid
Before they found me. In the reeds and mire
I stumbled forward, till the pool I saw
Which was my blood that made it.'

Then began

Another: 'When fulfilled thine own desire,
And the high mount is won, I pray thee aid
The longing that I show thee. I was bred
In Montefeltro; Buonconte I.
There is no voice that on my part hath prayed,
Not even Giovanna. Hence I go
Downcast, amidst of these more fortunate.'

I said: 'What chanced at Campaldino? Trace
Was found not of thee; nor thy burial place
Was known to any.'

'Truth I speak,' he said,
For thy repeating. Archiano's flow
In Apennine, above the Hermitage,
Runs down to Casentino's vale, to blend
With Arno's wider stream. Thither I came
Dismounted, wearied, fugitive. I bled
With every step, throat-wounded. There I fell.
Sight failed me, and my voice on Mary's name

Called, and was stilled forever. My empty course
Alone was left, for there God's Angel came
And took me. But there cried a voice from hell:
"O Thou of Heaven, can one poor word redeem?
One tear win pardon? Wilt thou rob my right?
At least, his mortal part is mine, to end
In different wise!" Thou knowest the mists that rise
From Pratomagno to the mountain-ridge,
Filling the great vale at times, until the skies
Congeal them as they reach the colder height?
This mist hell's angel called. At falling night
The valley filled, until the impregnate air
Poured rain in torrents, and every swollen stream
Rushed to the river in irresistible force.
The Archian foam, from narrow banks unpenned,
Found at its mouth my stiffening form, and there
Breaking apart the cross mine arms had made,
It flung me into Arno. There at last,
Swept down by swift deep currents, my bones are laid
Where the land's spoils in muddied depths are cast.'

Then sighed a voice behind: 'When home once more
In restful peace from thy long wandering,
Recall La Pia. That Siena bore,
Maremma ended. This he knows too well
Who on this hand, that wore an earlier ring,
Placed his own gem. I have no place in hell,
Who died unguilty. This I charge thee tell.'

CANTO VI

When the last dice are thrown, the loser still
Remains disconsolate. Again he throws,
To test experience. But the victor goes,
With elbowing friends around him. One retains
His side; another pulls his cloak; a third
Obstructs his path. He does not pause to fill
The expectant hands that reach to share his gains,
But moving onward still, with casual word
To right and left contents them. As they hear

The promised boon, their importunity
Is stayed, and in this wise he shakes them clear
And finds his exit. In that multitude
So felt I, facing right and left to stay
Their prayers with pledges. Benincasa here,
Who learnt his death from Ghino, pressed beside
That other from Arezzo - he who died
By drowning, in his foes' pursuit. Here too
Novello with appealing hands I viewed,
And him of Pisa, who the fortitude
Of good Marzucco could not break. I saw
Count Orso; and that soul whom envy slew,
As his last words maintained. She well may heed,
The Lady of Brabant, while yet she lives,
Lest haply at the last a juster law
Consign her to a fouler company
Than this, where Dalla Broccia came.

When freed

At last from all these pleading souls, who sought
The prayer of those yet living, that themselves
Might gain a sooner sanctity, I asked:
'O guiding light! my thoughts recall thy line
Which taught that prayer is vain, high Heaven's decree
To shake or change. It seems thy verdict gives
The pleadings that we heard to end in naught.
Are those who pray for souls so prisoned self-tasked
In wasted effort? Or these words of thine
Transcend mine understanding?'

He replied:

'My words were clear, and, justly weighed, decline
Thy mind's assertion. Not in vain they pray;
Nor is God's justice foiled because the fire
Of Love makes instant satisfaction
To the full sum that earthly faults require.
I spoke of only those whose hope is gone.
There is no power in any prayer from hell.
It has no access to the Throne. But yet
Rest not thy mind in this suspicion,
Nor take my teaching here, except it be
Confirmed by Her to whom thou goest, for She

Shall guide thee to the truth. You may not guess
My thought is of Beatrice. On this height
She waits thee, radiant in felicity.'

Then said I: 'Good my Leader, let us press
At better speed ahead. My weariness
Hath fallen from me; and the shades of night,
That lengthen round us, urge our haste.'

He said:

'We shall advance our upward course today
As light allows, but different is the way
From that thou thinkest. Ere thy feet are set
On that far summit, the retreating sun
Again shall greet us. . . But that spirit observe
Who stands alone and silent. He will show
The swiftest passage where thy heart would go.'

At that, we turned toward it. Cold disdain,
O Lombard spirit, was in thine eyes, aloof
And silent, as we passed. A drowsing lion
Might thus have scorned us, till my Master spake,
Enquiring for the best ascent. And then
It did not answer, but enquired again
Whence and who were we in the world of men?
My Master answered: 'Mantua -' and thereat
The solitary spirit rose to take
A swift embrace. 'O Mantuan friend,' he cried,
'I am Sordello, of thine own town!' His pride
Forgotten at once.

O Italy, faction-rent!

O servile! Storm-flung vessel unpiloted!
Hostel of sorrows! A queen of lands no more,
But house of prostitution! Here was said
Merely the name of his loved home, for him,
That gentle spirit, all else to forget
And clasp the speaker.

Search from shore to shore

Of all thy seas - thine inmost glades explore,
And where is peace within thee? Where is set
A moat that doth not in its girth contain

The strife of factious foes? What continent wall
But townsmen at the hands of townsmen fall
Within the mockery of its girdle vain?
What boots Justinian gave thy reins repair
If none can mount thee, and thy seat is bare?
Thy shame is greater. Ah! thou race misled,
Couldst thou not give the glory to God, and yet
Maintain thy Caesar in his temporal power?

O Austrian Albert! in that fatal hour
When the wild beast thy bridle owned, oh, then
Why was thy spur left bloodless? Now she rears
Fierce, savage, tameless. In the sight of men
May some strange vengeance find thy race, to awe
The princes that succeed thee. Heaven's just law
Shall doom thee, and thy father, who beheld
The wider German lands, and in that greed
Left his fair garden to the invading weed.

Behold them, Capulet and Montague;
Monaldi, Filippeschi; one with fears,
The other with arrived calamity,
In turn confounded. Callous to all our need!
Behold the sufferings of thy nobles - nude
Of all things through thy service; then conclude
How safe Santafiore! Come, behold
Thy widowed Rome - the Rome that was thy bride
Deserted, destitute, who calleth now,
My Caesar, hast thou left me? If no ruth
Disturb thee to behold our griefs, let shame
Find entrance, for our state defouls thy fame.
And if my words may dare such flight - O Thou,
Almighty! who for us wast crucified,
Are Thy just eyes withdrawn? Or dost Thou plan
Within Thy counsels, deep, inscrutable,
Some ultimate good, beyond the thought of man,
From all this evil? For the land we love
Is ruined by tyrants. Each side-serving cheat
Becomes Marcellus in his own conceit.

But thou, my Florence, well content wilt see
The shaft of censure winged that nears not thee,
By reason ruled, and subtle argument.
For though in many hearts is justice set,
Yet counsel hinders, and the shaft is slow,
Late fixed, and loosened from a slackening bow.
But thine have justice on their lips! The weight
Of public office, and the cares of state,
Are shirked by many; but thy people cry:
'I charge myself unasked, not backward I.'
Be happy in thy wisdom: rest content.
Regard thy wealth, thy peace! If scorn were meant
When thus I praise thee, needst thou care for that?
Will not the event resolve it?

Once were named
Athens and Lacedaemon not for naught.
Their gracious living, and the laws they framed,
Gave them repute well founded; but to thee
What were they at their greatest? Thou canst weave
Such subtle counsels that a month will find
The last month's wisdom left a mock behind.

How often hast thou in remembered time
Changed coinage, customs - all but race and clime -
So that, if to thyself thyself be clear,
Thou must in all this restless change appear
As one who on her sickbed turns to gain
A moment's respite from returning pain.

CANTO VII

Three times and four their glad embraces met,
By those dear native memories urged, before
Past loss he might for present gain forget,
And asked what name my noble Leader bore.

He answered: 'Ere the herewith flight began
Of souls that by this Mount to God ascend,
My bones were buried by Octavian.
For I am Virgil. By no fault of sin

Debarred of Heaven, but lacking faith to win
The ultimate crown.'

As one whose eyes are set
Upon a scene that dumb amazement breeds,
So that 'It is not' to 'It is' succeeds
As sight and reason war, so looked he then.
But as the incredible doubt resolved, he bent
And humbly he embraced my Leader's knees.

'Oh, glory of the Latin race,' he said.
'Revealer of our tongue's high potencies,
Eternal jewel of the place wherein
My life began, what merit of mine could win
The grace of thy regarding? Wilt thou deign
To say if Hell, and from which ward of pain,
Thy spirit hath freed?'

He answered: 'All the woe
That fills the circles of the realm below
Mine eyes have seen, but not as one misled
To earn its scourging. Neither rise I free
As one released therefrom. A Power constrains
That I, who led through Hell's interior pains,
Lead upward also. But mine own abode
Immutable Justice hath decreed; for through
Not what I did but what I did not do
I stand excluded from the Light Divine
Which thou canst hope. There is a place below
From bliss made absent but reserved from woe,
Where no fire enters though no sun may shine,
And sorrow ends in sighing. There I stay
With those newborn whom Death's sharp teeth betray
Too soon for sin's release. With those am I
Who knew not faith, nor hope, nor charity,
Yet virtues all besides the holy three
They practised, faultless in themselves. . . But tell,
I pray thee, if thou canst, what upward way
Will lead us to the gate we seek, wherethrough
We reach the purgatorial wards.'

He said:

'We are not hindered to one place. We go

Upward at will, or else around, and so
I need not speak a path myself can show.
But see! the day declines. It were not well
To wander blindly, by the dark misled.
It were but wisdom of the hour to seek
A place of harbour for the night. Nearby,
But somewhat to the right, a rest is set
Where spirits apart until the morn will lie
In ease of concord which you might not share
Without delight in converse.'

'Nay, but why,'

My Leader answered, 'need we loiter thus?
Is there to reach that Gate no path for us
But night will hinder? Or will those be there
Whose mission is denial?'

'None will stay,'

Sordello answered, 'where you walk. But not'
- He drew a finger on the ground - 'so far
As is that short line's length from where you are
Would you make progress in the night. The will
Fails with the light. You would but blindly stray:
Most likely down.'

My Master looked as one
Who wonders but accepts. 'Then lead,' he said,
'To where this pleasure will requite delay.'

A little distance from that place away,
And sidelong to the rising Mount, he led.
Until we came to where a valley lay
Hollowing its side (our native hills include
Such lofty clefts), and here a pathway fell
At times, or levelled as it wound, from which,
Half downward now, the valley's floor we viewed.

Gold and fine silver, cochineal and lead,
The Indian wood-blue lucid and serene,
The fresh-flaked shining of the emerald green,
Would fade defeated from too hard compare
With the bright flowers and spreading verdure there.
Not colour only, but their fragrant scent

- Nature to one a thousand odours blent -
A large anonymous delight supplied,
Sweetness unsingled, unidentified.
And in the midst a group of souls were seen
Salve Regina singing.

'Where they sit,'

The Mantuan said, 'I will not lead as yet.
For we can view them, till the sun be set,
Better than when you join them there below. . .
He who sits highest, and alone, as though
Repenting negligence too late, with lips
That move not to his comrades' chant, is he
Who might have healed the wounds of Italy,
The Emperor Rudolph, through whose fault she sought
A new physician. He who sits beside,
As offering comfort, ruled the land wherein
The waters rise that to the Moldau flow,
And Moldau to the Elbe conveys, and she
Receives and carries to the distant sea.
Ottocar was he named. His life began
Better in childhood than, a bearded man,
His son, King Wenceslas, could boast to be,
Sloughed in soft ease and hindering luxury.

'And he, the short-nosed man, who beats his breast,
And seems to share their counsel, it was he
Who died in flight that soiled the lilies' pride,
Outhounded from Verona. He beside
Sighs with like woe, the while his cheek is pressed
Into the bed his palm provides. Aware
Is either of the common woes they share.
Father, and father of his bride, are they
To him who lives as France's curse today;
And hence the grief that irks them.

'He beyond,

The large-limbed man who chants in unison,
In life with every kingly virtue girt,
Is Peter, once the Third of Aragon;
And he, the youth who sits behind, his son,
Who, had he long retained the crown, had shown

Worth following worth. But those succeeding heirs,
Frederick and James, have proved that he who wears
The father's crown not often emulates
The father's virtues, which from God alone
Must each derive.

'This truth, to equal pains,
The large-nosed man who sings with Peter knows,
By which Apulia's and Provence's banes
Already appear. So much the plant it bore
The virtue of the seed excelled, as more
Than could Beatrice or than Margaret
Constance still boasts her husband's worth.

'Apart
From these, is Henry Third of England set:
He of the simple blameless life. To him
Was nobler issue.

'At the feet of all,
With lifted eyes, the Marquis William sits.
For whom, immured in Alessandria's wall,
On Monferrato and the Cevanese
Did war's intolerable scourging fall.'

CANTO VIII

It was that hour when they who seaward fare
Look back with longing through the darkened air,
Tender of heart for those dear friends whom they
Left at the morn; and if the pilgrim hear
A bell far, love stirs at the sweet sound
That spreads its sorrow to the dusk around,
Lamenting, as it seems, the death of day;
When I my sight upon one Shade anear
So fixed, I failed my Leader's words to hear.

I saw it signal with a lifted hand
To those around, and then its arms expand,
Stretched to the East, as though to God it said:
*There is naught else I hear, naught else I see,
Only I reach to lose my soul in Thee.*

Then from its mouth *Te lucis ante* came
In such sweet notes, with such devoutness wed,
That my surrendered spirit caught the flame,
Oblivious of myself; and every Shade
Gesture and song of aspiration made,
Following the hymn, and with their eyes intent
On those supernal wheels, God's firmament.
Oh, reader, here the hiding veil is thin,
Make keen thine eyes to seek the truth within.

Humble and pale, I saw that noble troop
Gaze upward, silent at the ended hymn,
As though they waited till the Heavens should stoop.
Till downward through the dusk, that now was dim,
Two angels in a single wonder came,
And in their hands two swords of shortened flame,
Shorn of their points; and their down-planing wings
Were green, and all their wind-blown raiment, green
As leaves newborn, as when on Earth is seen
The tender break of her returning Springs.

One settled near above to where we stayed;
The second on the further bank delayed;
The Shades assembling in the space between.
I saw their heads, of Heaven's high comeliness,
Except their eyes, that none might face to see.
Virtue, invisible through its own excess,
So hides itself from those as weak as we.

'They come from Mary's heart,' Sordello said,
'To guard this vale; for when the night is spread
The serpent else would make of these his prey.'
At which I shrank, who knew not by what way
The evil might approach, more close beside
The backward shoulder of my trusted Guide,
Chilled by that fear. Sordello's words the while
Continued thus: 'But let us downward go
Without more pause these noble Shades amid.
Well will it please them ye who come to know.'

Three steps - if recollection hold, but three -
Sufficed to bring us to the Shades below.
Close came I there to one I might not see
At distance that the darkening twilight hid,
Whose eyes to me, as my glad eyes to him,
Joined in one glance. Gallura's ruler he.
The noble Nino. Much I joyed to see
Hell had not closed him in its portals grim.

No salutation failed of courtesy
Between us twain, before he asked how long
Since I, across the intervening sea,
Had come to the desirable Mount. Whereto
I answered: 'Nay, but through the place of woe,
With limbs that to my human life belong,
I came by Heaven's excepting choice, and go
Such path that yet the second life to know
Good hope is mine.'

At this, in like amaze
Sordello and the Pisan backward drew.
Sordello on my Guide bewildered gaze
Directed. Nino, to a Shade who sat
On the near bank, exclaimed: 'Up, Conrad, see
What God in grace hath willed.' And then to me:
'I pray thee by this favour singular,
Thy debt to Him whose purpose none may read,
Whose wherefores lie too deep for human wit,
That when you cross once more the waters far
You charge Giovanna to intercede
Where the petitions of the innocent
Will not be vain to aid me. Scarce I think
Her mother loves me longer, since she changed
Her widow's wimple, shortly to repent
That thus she showed how women's hearts estranged
From the dead love, unpraised and uncaressed,
Forget so quickly. But she will not find
More sculptured honour on her tomb designed
By the coiled viper of the Milanese
Than had her faith retained Gallura's crest.'

He spake assured, as one made confident
Within his own integrity. But I
Mine eyes had lifted to the central sky
Wherein the process of the stars is slow,
As near its axle moves the wheel. My Guide
Observed and questioned: 'Son, what point on high
Attracts thee thus?' And I to him: 'The glow
Of those three torches on this side the pole.'
To which he answered: 'Those four stars are low
Which pleased thee at their morning height, and these
Are risen to where they were.'

But while he spake
Sordello drew toward him. 'See,' he cried,
'How comes our foe.' And where the vale was wide
From its unguarded end advanced a snake
Such as perchance the bitter dole supplied
That ruined Eden. Through the flowers it came
Of that fair valley, with a backward head
At times, that licked and sleeked its scales, as though
Assured and leisured for the overthrow
Of those it sought.

I did not see their flight
When first the hawks of heaven beheld their prey,
And that I did not see I will not say.
But, as I watched the snake, the sound I heard
Above me, as the swift green pinions beat,
And raised mine eyes toward the heavenly sight,
The while the hasting of the snake's retreat
Confessed their power. The angels wheeled abreast,
And backward to their perches soared.

The Shade

That Nino called, through all the snake's attack,
Held his fixed gaze upon me. Now he said:
'So may the candle of thy will provide
Sufficient that the lantern shall not lack
That leads thee upward, till the emerald track
Disclose the summit, as thy lips shall tell
True news of Valdimagra. I who speak
Am Conrad Malaspina - not the first,
But from that first derived. To those who dwell

In that dear vale, my love, now purified,
Is constant ever.'

I to this replied:

'I was not ever in thy land, but through
All Europe's numerous tribes were vain to seek
For those who had not heard its name. So loud
Thy House's fame proclaims it. - This I swear
By all my hope of heaven: in all men's view
It hath not ceased its honour. Its sword is clean:
Its wealth untarnished. While the general crowd
Follows the evil road the Church's Head
Misleads them to their loss, in cleaner air
Thy gentler race, by use and custom led,
Keep the straight path.'

He answered: 'Yea, but go -
With this assurance go: The sun shall lie
Not seven times more in that nocturnal bed
Which with four feet the Ram bestrides, but thou,
If naught the natural course divert, shalt know
The truth of this thou sayest in courtesy,
By the sharp impact of thy private woe.'

CANTO IX

The concubine of ancient Tithonus
Was rising whitely from her leman's bed
Along the gallery of the East, her head
Gemmed with cold radiance of the Scorpion's stars,
While the two steps had passed beneath her feet
By which she mounts upon the Night's retreat,
And planed the third its downward wings, when I,
Whose spirit had not cast its mortal bars,
As had those others, might no more deny
The needs of rest, and on the ground, where they,
My five companions, still conversing sat,
I stretched, and soon in sleep's oblivion lay.

What time the swallow stirs to plaintive song,
Ere the dawn widens in the East, as though
She wakes to memory of her ancient woe,

And when it seems our spirits least belong
To earth, or bonds of human thought, but stray,
Or follow guides divine pilgrim way
To visions that approach celestial kind,
Then saw I in the far blue heights of air,
With wide-stretched wings, a golden eagle soar:
An eagle poised to swoop. And I was where
The friends of Ganymede he left behind
Stood (so it seemed) and upward gazed, when he
Was raped aloft to Heaven's consistory.

'Perhaps,' I thought, 'it soars by custom here
Disdaining else to strike an earthly prey.'
And, as I thought, it wheeled, and stooped, and came
Swifter than any bolt, and yet more dread,
And bore me upward in its claws. . . The flame
Of Heaven was round us now. I felt it sear
My shrinking flesh, and in that tortured fear
Perforce I waked. Achilles once, as I,
Looked with astonished wakened eyes around,
What time his mother, who from Chiron fled,
Bore him asleep to Scyros, from which place
The Greeks expelled him at a later day.

Thus was I, as from my bewildered face
Slumber's oblivion passed, for air and ground
Were strange and different, and I felt as one
Frozen by fear to deathly cold. The sun
Two hours had risen. I looked around to see
A steep bare height. Beneath, the distant sea.

Only my Comforter was there, of all
I knew when sleep approached us. But his voice
Gave swift assurance. 'Do not fear at all.
Shrink not, but rouse thy senses. Here are we
Well placed for our ascension. Purgatory
Is here before us. See the galleried girth:
The gap suggesting entrance. . . At the birth
Of twilight, while the dawn was not the day,
And while thy soul within thee slept, there came

A spirit downward from the heights, who said:
'Lucia am I: upon his upward way
It is my part to speed him.' With the word
She took thee, sleeping, in her arms, and so
Led upward, while our friends remained below.
She laid thee here. With starbright eyes she showed
That gap that opens to the further road:
And sleep and she together went their way.'

As one whose fear slow-entering truths expel
For doubt and then for comfort, so was I
Transformed by this disclosure. All my dread
Fell from me. Seeing this, the path he led
Between the rampart and the steep descent,
To where that gate for ransomed souls was set.
(See, reader, how I guide my theme on high,
Nor wonder if my conscious art shall vie
To reach its exaltation.)

Now we neared

The place we sought, and that which first appeared
A fissure upright in the wall, became
A gateway entrance, with three steps that shone
Three colours; and in blinding light thereat,
Foiling mine eyes, a silent porter sat.
Sometime this silence held, the while the flame
His sword reflected, with my sight at war
Half baffled, half allowed, and glimpses saw
And faltered off his face: the light thereon
Too near to Heaven's for mortal eyes. He said
At last: 'Ye who so strangely stand, beware
Of hurt that waits for those who nearer dare,
And have no escort to release their way. -
Stand backward, while your present cause you say.'

My Master answered: 'How these things may be
Is ours to ask, but not unwarranted
We come. A dame of Heaven, it was but now,
Said to us: "There the entrance gates you see:
Go thither".'

'May she guide your steps to good,'

The porter answered, with an altered brow,
'Ascend, unfearing.'

Then we boldly drew
To those three steps. The first was marble white,
So finely polished that, as there I stood,
Myself was mirrored. Basalt, born of fire,
Darker than purple, was the next. Its face
Was rugged, and two cracks, the sacred sign,
Divided breadth and length. The third in hue
Was flaming porphyry. No blood so bright
From the pierced artery spouts. The angel's place
Was granite, where he sat, his feet the while
On the third step.

Upward my Leader drew
My diffident feet. 'Ask humbly thy desire,'
His voice was urgent, 'that he let thee through.'

Devoutly at the holy feet I fell.
Three times I smote my breast the while I pled
For mercy and for entrance. He thereat
The point of that sight-blinding sword applied
Upon my forehead while I knelt. He traced
Seven Ps thereon, the mortal sins to tell.
'Fail not, within, to wash these signs,' he said.
From out his raiment, cinder-brown in hue,
Or like to earth that cracks with drought, he drew
Two keys, one gold, one silver. These he placed
- The silver, then the gold - within the lock,
Which yielded, to my hearts content.

'These two
Must smoothly turn, for if the wards should block
It means,' he said, 'that entrance is denied.
More costly one; but that of worth the less
Needs more of art to turn, and more of wit.
The intricacies of the lock by it
Are solved and conquered. Peter's hand supplied
These keys, and charged me that mine own should err
Rather, with those who come in humbleness,
To open than refuse.'

The while he spake

He pushed the gate wide open. 'Go,' he said,
'Right upward, only with one thought for spur:
Those who look back are backward brought.'

Less shrill

Tarpeia bellowed for Metellus' loss,
Whereby she languished with lean flanks unfed,
Than on their pins those metal hinges swung.
But I turned from them, more intent to hear
A higher music, which did faintly break
On doubtful ears.

As when some chant is sung
To organ music which prevails so high
That half the words are heard and half are drowned,
So through that sweet and distant harmony
I caught *Te Deum* in uncertain sound.

CANTO X

Within that gate which love of evil leaves
Too little sought of human souls, because
To it the tortuous way seems straight, I heard
The clanging close. But did I therefore pause,
Or backward glance? For such a fault as that
What plea could hope for pardon?

Upward cleaves

The difficult way, through rocks that here recede,
And here come forward, like a moving tide.
My Leader cautioned: 'Here, from side to side,
Our crooked passage, as the rocks allow,
And with some art, we need to choose.'

His word

So true became, the waning moon had set
Before we issued from that toilsome net.

It was a cornice where we came, no more
In breadth than three men's length would reach. Before
The sheer rock rose: behind the sheer rock fell.
To right, to left, the cornice stretched, more bare
Even to the limit of sight, than roads that lie
Through desert lands, and in uncertainty

Which way to turn, and I being wearied, there
Sometime we stayed. Upon the fronting rock
I gazed. It seemed, our further course to block,
It rose unleft by fissure, gate or stair.
But its own marvel filled mine eyes. Its white
Clear marble was with sculptured wealth so well,
So richly furnished, Polycletus' art
Not only, but the actuality
Of Nature, might accept the inferior's scorn.

I saw an angel who, I might have sworn,
Spoke *Hail!* to her to whom he came to tell
The gracious verdict that reversed our woe,
When the long-wept-for peace, by Heaven's decree,
To men was granted; held no more apart
By God's refusal of our guilt. For she
To whom he bent, who turned the holy key
Of Love's high gates, this speech imprinted showed:
Ecce ancilla Dei! Apt as seal
On the soft wax.

But spoke my kindly Guide,
Who, on the side where beats the human heart,
Stood closely to me: 'Cast thine eyes more wide.
Be not content a single sight to know.'
Whereat I looked, and on his further side
A separate sculpture showed. Straight view to gain,
I passed before him.

Here the marble live
Seemed motion, as their car the oxen drew,
Bearing the sacred ark, which taught the bane
Of those who more than seemly service do.

Before them moved seven choirs. My senses warred:
'They sing.' 'They sing not.' With no more accord
Sight knew the incense real that scent denied.
The humble Psalmist, more and less than king,
Danced on before, with garments girded high;
While Michal, from a palace window nigh,
Looked sombre scorn upon him.

I moved to bring

Before mine eyes the next bright history
That gleamed beyond that leaning queen's contempt.

Here rode the prince for whom Saint Gregory
By prayer won Heaven: the saint's high victory
According to the Emperor's worth. Was he,
Trajan, outriding seen. Beneath his rein
A woman wept. Around him horsemen rode
With stir of trampling hooves beneath. Above,
The golden eagles that his standards showed
Swayed in the wind, so live the scene. It seemed,
The woman holding to his bridle said:
'Lord, wilt thou venge me for my dearest dead,
My son, for whom I mourn uncomforted?'
And he to her: 'My soon return await.'
And she, as one by urgent grief possessed:
'But, Lord, if thou return not?' 'Then will he
True justice deal who takes my vacant state.'
'But will another's deed be praise for thee,
Who hast thyself ignored it?' He thereat:
'Take comfort, for thy prayers prevail. The plea
Of justice rules, and pity's call must be
As potent to delay me.'

Visible speech

So sculptured we beheld, beyond the reach
Of earthly art: nor can I clearly tell
A thing so different.

While I paused to see

These images of high humility,
Dear for themselves and their superior art,
My Leader urged me: 'Hold no more apart
Thy mind from our adventure. Those appear
Whose slow continuous movements bring them here,
And they will point us to the upward way.'

Mine eyes, which ever love new sights to see,
Transferred the intentness of their gaze thereat
From those high sculptures to the sight that he
Already beheld.

Reader, I would not be

The cause of thy confusion, to dismay
Thy difficult efforts to the goal divine,
Through fear of how God's justice works. Forget
The form of the chastising. Think, the debt
Is cancelled at the last. It cannot go
Beyond the limited sentence. Still will shine
The eternal consummation.

I began:

'Master, what see I? Sure, it is not man
Who moveth thus my troubled sight to blur.'

He answered: 'Men they are. Their torment dire
So bows them. At the first, my sight was strained
Correctly to determine what they were.
But look, as one who pulls the vines apart
For clearer vision. Fixedly require
Thine eyes to answer what is he below
The nearer rock. Now canst thou well perceive
How each is pinched.'

Oh, Christians, self-content!
Way-weary, miserable, yet confident
In laggard paces! Do ye fail to know
That present worms are we, though formed to cleave
The chrysalis, that the angelic butterfly,
Unshamed and undisguised its course may soar,
To find the seat of judgment? Why so high
Your minds exalt, who are but grubs, before
You come to transformation?

As we see

A corbel quaintly carved, that breast and knee
Grotesquely meet, the while it bends to bear
The monstrous weight of floor or roof, that so
Our minds are shaken by the seeming show
Of such distorting burden, so to me
Those crouching forms appeared. I saw them there
So burdened, so distorted. More or less,
According to their weighted backs, distress
So bent them. He who crouched the lowliest head,
Weeping, 'I can no more,' it seemed he said.

CANTO XI

'Our Father, who dost dwell in Heaven most high,
(Not as confined therein, nor limited,
But that in Heaven is Thy pavilion spread
Of Love transcendent which no sins defy,)
Thy name may all thy creatures sanctify.
Thy Kingdom's peace be ours; for all our wit
Will prove but nothing in default of it.
As of their will Thy chanting angels bend,
From lowlier men may equal praise ascend.
While this rough desert with slow toil we tread,
Give us the manna of our daily bread.
As we condone their faults with whom we live,
Do Thou, regardless of our worth, forgive
Our weakness, that too soon is foiled. Protect,
And lead not where, for thrall of Thine elect,
The serpent lurks. - But this last prayer we pray,
Not for ourselves, but those we left, for they
Are not from sin's assault released, as we
Who, while we bend, the sure, far glory see.'

So for themselves, and those who are not yet
Released from danger of the Pit, they prayed.
If they forget not, say, should we forget
To call on Heaven to grant their equal aid?

Now the first ledge their burdened crawlings wound.
As in some dreadful and fantastic dream,
Oppressed contortions moved. My Leader asked:
'I pray you - so may soon your wings out-gleam,
Uplifting to the swift ascent - declare
The shortest way toward some possible stair
For this my comrade, whose desire is bound
By earth's retarding flesh.'

From these, so tasked,
With crushing burdens that I could not see
Which one it was that spake, a voice arose:
'Come to the right the way we take, for we
Can show a passage where a living man

Could clamber upward. Did no burden span
My neck, that once was stiff with pride, and bear
My visage to the ground, I fain would scan
The face of him who comes from earth, to learn
If he be friend or stranger; and to claim
His pity for this weight that none may share.

'Italian was I, and my father's name,
William Aldobrandescho, Tuscany
Called not ignoble. If this stranger know
Our old repute I will not ask, but I
So dwelt upon their puissance that my pride
Despited all men. From that cause I died.
There is no child in Campagnatico
But talks the tale of how Umberto brought
His consorts to their equal fall. And now
This weight I bear till God be satisfied
That arrogant life hath learned humility,
Having come to death's apartment.'

Low to bow

My head to hear him was a natural thought,
And as I did so, one who came beside
(Not he who spake) a twisting motion made
By which a difficult glance he upward cast,
And recognised, and called me.

'Oh,' I cried,

'Art thou not Oderisi? - He who brought
Much honour to Agubbio, practising there
The Art which Paris calls *enluminer*?'
'My brother,' he replied, 'Bologna's praise
In Franco's parchments fairer smiles. My art
Was crescent to his fuller orb. Be sure
My talk was different in the emulous days
I spent on earth! For envy urged my heart,
Content with naught but excellence. You see
Of pride's high vaunt the heavy-bending fee.

'Even thus to take of pride the patient cure
I had not entered, save to God I turned
Before my sin's occasion ceased. Behold,

How vain are human words, and dextrous skill,
As cause for glory! How short time until
The outgrown green the coming years deny.

'Cimabue of his art was confident
That none could rout him from the field, yet now
Giotto's painting wins the louder cry.
A Guido from a Guido's brows hath rent
The wreath of his pre-eminence, whereby
The further truth discloses. These will die,
And one now born may both their fames prevent
By other excellence. The world's report
Is wind that hence and hither blows, and brings
New names from new directions. What outwings
A short millenium's space? Ere that be spent
The child who dies with speech half-learnt and thou
Have found an equal end. A thousand years -
What are they different from an eyelid's blink
Beside the eternal? As a blink is naught
Beside the slowest heaven's complete revolve
Their time is trivial.

'He who next appears
And crawls across our sight his difficult way
All Tuscany applauded. Scarcely now
Siena recollects his names, that link
Therewith the cries of ruin, when orgulous
As now made abject, Florence arms outfought
Went down at Montaperti. Such repute
As thine may promise shall not longer stay
Than grass His fervent summer dries away
Whose spring gave freshness to its growth.'

I said:

'Thy words make humble all my pride, for true
My reason owns them. . . Wilt thou tell me now
Of whom you last were speaking?'

'He you mean
Is Provençal Salvani, grovelling thus
Because he sought in mood presumptuous
Siena wholly to his feet to bow.
Who take on earth an overweening way -

Behold the crushing coin in which we pay!'

'But if the spirit who through life delays
Repentance to the last,' I asked, 'be held
For the same period that its acts rebelled
Chained down to earth, except that kindly prayer
Assist its passage, how, from hindrance clear,
Has so short time availed to bring him here?'

He answered: 'While he lived in glory there,
Shameless to tread Siena, once his stand
He took, though all his pulses shook with fear,
A friend from Charles's dungeon-chains to free;
And that good deed was potent to expand
The else-barred boundaries. - Though I may not tell
A clearer tale, yet short the time shall be
Before thy neighbours' talk confirm it well.'

CANTO XII

As oxen in an equal yoke are paired,
So with that burdened soul awhile I shared
Motion and gait, until my patient Guide
Rebuked me gently: 'Each with oar and tide,
And as aloft the spreading sails allow,
His barque must urge.'

At this, I ceased to bow
Mine outward form, and rose erect to take
The steps of natural freedom, while within
My prostrate spirit cowered uncomforted.

But when some space behind my active Guide
My willing feet had hastened, 'Look,' he said,
'Look downward! For the sight of where you tread
Will prove your consolation.'

As we make
Graven memorials of our kinsmen dead,
Recording on their tombs of how they died,
And what their lives accomplished, so to win
The tears of recollection; even so,

But far in art superior, ranged below
A pictured record on the whole extent
Of that mount-circling road by which we went.

There saw I Lucifer as lightning fall,
Heaven's noblest cast from Heaven. The further side
Showed where Briareus, raised by equal pride,
Smitten by celestial lightning, sprawled supine,
By chill death weighted to the earth he spurned.
Thymbraeus I saw. Pallas and Mars I saw
Yet armed around their father, gazing down
Upon the giant's dismembered limbs. I saw
Nimrod beneath his toil bewildered stand,
The nations ranged around on either hand
Who shared his pride in Shinar. Tears were mine
Thy seven and seven children, Niobe,
Slain in their youth around thy feet to see.
And here was Saul, face-fallen, pierced and dead
By his own conquered weapon: rain nor dew
Gilboa from that fated moment knew.

And foolish here I saw Arachne too,
Half-spider now, and mournful to survey
The tatters of the work her hurt had wrought.
And Rehoboam, his high threats forgot,
Now terrored in his clanging chariot fled
The hard pursuit behind him.

Forward lay

Vision succeeding vision. Alcmaeon
Within the lucid pavement made appear
His mother's bright adorning bought too dear.
Further, Sennacherib on the temple stone
Stretched lifeless, while his murdering sons withdrew.
And next Tomyris, who to Cyrus said:
'With blood that was thy thirst I feed thee full.'
And all the pitiless ruin she caused was shown.
Headless beyond, the bold Assyrian bull.
Great Holofernes, sprawled, whom Judith slew,
While on its flying rear his army bled.
Troy saw I also there, how piteous low!

Blackened and hollowed by its eating fire,
And all its pride degraded.

Is there known
Among our mortal craftsmen one to show,
With pencil or with graver, art like this?
Shadow and line alike were absolute
In reproduction. Living men were seen
As live as in past time their deeds had been,
And those whose deaths recording stone declared
Were dead beyond denial. Those who shared
The events themselves no clearer saw than I
The while I bowed to watch them. Lift ye high,
Eve's children, all your haughty necks, nor bow
To see your condemnation!

While I bent,
Further upon that circling path we went,
And more the sun's diurnal course was spent
Than I, whose mind was thus preoccupied,
Was ware until I heard my Leader chide,
Who watchful all this time had walked ahead:
'Be ye no longer heedless! Lift thine eyes!
Behold the angel in the path! Regard
How the sixth handmaid of the day returns.
Dispose thyself to act in reverent wise
That he may deign to point the upward way.
Consider ever that the failing day
No second dawn delivers.'

Such rebuke
I heard too often not to heed. Mine eyes
I raised to see the angel. Close he came,
White-clad, and in his face, no threatening flame,
There shone the light of morning's tremulous star.
His hands he reached. His wide white wings he spread.
'Come forward, for the steps are near,' he said,
'And easy is the upward path from now.'

Oh, race of men, for such ascent designed,
Why doth so little wind your course divert?
Why come so few that angel's voice to hear?

He led us where the rock was hewn. He beat
His wings about my forehead. 'Mount, and find
Thy feet secure,' he said.

As where the street
Mounts from the Rubaconte bridge to reach
That church that from its high precipitous hill
Surveys the well-ruled city, the slant is cut
With steps that piety had hewn when still
The measures of the market-place were sure;
The public records seemed to rest secure,
So here the steep, that else no man might climb
The second round to reach, an upward stair
Ascends, though right and left the closing wall
The climbers' elbows graze.

A song sublime,
Beyond resource of mortal words to tell,
Our ears encountered as we clomb. Recall
How different were the sounds we heard in hell
At each dread circle's entrance! *Beati*
Pauperes spiritu they chanted now.

'Master, how swift the holy stairs I tread!'
Astonished at the light ascent I said.
For weariness I felt not, and a weight
Was lifted from my heart.

And he replied:
'The letters on thy brow the porter traced
Are fainter now, and were they all erased,
As one already is, thy feet would feel
Such holy impulse that their swift ascent
Would give more ease than pausing.'

I thereat,
As one who by another's gesture knows
That something which he would not else suspect
Has marked him, and in sight's default he lifts
A hand, that unknown object to detect
With outspread fingers felt, and found indeed
That of those letters marked upon my brow
By him who held the keys, remaining now

There were but six, and fainter those: the while
Uplifted by my Guide's approving smile.

CANTO XIII

Again a summit to the climbing stair.
Again a cornice round the mount did go,
And sooner circled than the zone below.
No shade we saw, nor any pictures there,
But right and left the rising rock was bare.
Those livid walls we faced, and only those.

So bare appeared the wall, so bare the way,
That Virgil counselled: 'If our steps we stay
To wait some guiding voice, too long delay
May hinder here.' He rightward turned, and raised
His eyes to Heaven's sweet light. 'O Light,' he said,
'Sweet Light, by which mankind is comforted!
Warm overbrooding Light, if naught beside
Give different urge, thou art our natural guide,
And we will follow in thy confidence.'

So went we on with eager wills, that thence
A mile we traversed in short time, until
We heard the wings of those we could not see
Fly past us, and the ear's alerted sense
Could hear them call us in their courtesy
To join the Table of Love. The first one cried:
Vinum non habent as it came, and still
Repeated till the sound in distance died.
But ere it ceased another came, who said:
'I am Orestes.' Down the wind it fled
As did that other.

'Father,' of my Guide
I asked, 'what may these sightless voices be?'
And while I asked another passing cried:
'Love those who wrong thee.' Then my Master said:
'Within this round is envy scourged, and so
Love wields the whip. But of an opposite sound
The reins must be. I think thou shalt not go

So far that thou our next release wilt know
Before you hear it. . . But thy gaze around
More keenly cast, for there are folk who sit
Beside us as we walk.'

With wider eyes

I looked, and all beneath the cliff there sat
Cloaked shades, whose colour and the rock were one.
Audibly they sighed: 'Ob, Mary, Mary, pray,
Pray for us!' . . . Michael . . . Peter . . . all the saints
Their cries assailed. I do not think today,
For all its ill, a man so hard were found
On earth compassion had not stirred thereat
Even to the source of tears.

At nearer view,

Their sightless pleading and their plight I knew.
With heavy grief I wept. It seemed that they
Were coarsely covered, as with cloth of hair;
And as the sightless ones their movements were
Who, at the Place of Pardons indigent,
Expose themselves for pity. So they leant
Each against each, or on the bank: so yearned
With pleading misery, as the blind, to plant
Compassion in those who pass the holy door.
And as the sun to those blind faces turned
Is darkness, so to these the Heavenly Light
Withholds. For as the wild hawks vainly pant
For freedom, blinded that they may not soar
With iron threads that interrupt their sight,
So did the wires these downdrawn eyelids bore.
It seemed as outrage to my heart that I
Walked with clear sight, while these to light denied
Could not behold me, and I turned to speak
The vexing doubt. But read my wiser Guide
The unspoken thought.

'Expose thy mind,' he said,

'Be brief and clear.' Upon the outer verge
He walked, where mortal feet might fail to keep
The fenceless edge, and on my leftward side
There were the shades devout, whose heavenly urge
Against the horrible stitching strained, to weep

Continual longing tears.

'O Folk, secure

To see the light at last! With short delay
May grace the pure spring of the mind permit
To break the scum that chokes it,' so I said,
'If you will tell me - gracious words and dear
My heart should count them - is there one man here
Who of the Latin lands is citizen?'

'Brother,' a voice made answer, 'rather say
"Who was a pilgrim once in Italy",
For we who were of devious wanderings then
Are now of one true city.'

I looked ahead,

With eyes obedient to the sound, and saw
A face strain blindly with a lifted chin.
To which I answered: 'Spirit, so tormented
For thine at last uplifting, if from thee
That protest came, I plead thy courtesy
Thine earthly place to tell, or how therein
Thy name was voiced.'

It answered: 'Sienese

I was, who cleanse with these my life astray,
Weeping to Him who will at last delay
Himself no longer. Sapia was my name,
But wise I was not. More my heart would please
To watch disaster to my foes than find
My ventures win. Until the day there came,
When somewhat down my arch of years declined,
That those of mine own city against their foes
Went out to battle, and there I God besought
His will to work. But when the fight I saw
- The bitter routing of my foes - I thought
Not Heaven itself my final bliss could flaw.
I raised audacious face to God, and said:
"Now do I cease to fear Thee", as the merle
Mocked the wind-routed cloud, while the next shower
Came upward from the sea. Yet peace I sought
With Heaven, at life's extremity. My hour
Of ended penitence were not yet nigh

But that the holy prayers assault the sky
Of Peter Pettinagno. . . But I hear,
Surely, a breathing voice! Thine eyes appear,
By thy free steps, unclosed! Who art thou, thus
With power to pass unstitched, and question us
Made blind for envy here?'

'Mine eyes,' I said,
'Will yet be blinded, though my fear is less
For this, than for the heavy woes which press
The previous round. They have not been misled
So much by envy, as I think.'

And she:
'Then say by what strange guide thy feet are set
Herein, who have not passed the stage below?'

And I to her: 'In his sure charge I go
Who walks in silence at my side. I bear
As yet the burden of my flesh. And so,
If there be ways my feet in Tuscany,
O Spirit elect, may move to serve thee, speak!'

She answered: 'Since this wonder strange and new
Discloses God thy friend, I pray thee share
Sometime for me a moment of thy prayer;
And more, by that which here thou most dost seek,
I charge thee that mine earthly fame shall be
Renewed among my kindred, if thy feet
Indeed once more the Tuscan land shall tread -
Among those men you may my kindred meet
Whose hope is futile in Talamone,
Vainer than that which bored Diana's spring;
Such hope shall heaviest loss their seamen bring.'

CANTO XIV

'Who treads our circle ere his death permit
The winged ascent? To whom doth Heaven remit
The penance that our tortured eyelids know?'

'I know not whom he be. But this I know:

He comes companioned. Ask him, if thou wilt,
In words of winning softness, that he stay,
And grant us speech.'

I heard, beside our way,
On the right hand, two spirits in converse thus,
Who upward turned their blinded eyes to us,
While one petitioned: 'Thou, the fleshly bond
Who hast not burst, but yet, ignoring guilt,
Canst take the heavenward road, in charity
Console our curious minds; for marvellous
That which hath never been must always be.'

I answered: 'Down through midmost Tuscany
A stream from Falterona falls. Extends
Its course a hundred devious miles, and still
Unsated wanders. On its banks I wear
This mortal body, but the name I bear
Would nothing mean. Beyond immediate friends
It makes no sound as yet.'

The first replied:
'If to a hidden word my sense was wide,
You talk of Arno.'

'Why,' the second said,
'Makes he that river's name a mystery,
As careful lips avoid a word obscene?'

To which the first made answer: 'That to say
Is his, not mine. But well its name had been
Cast to forgetfulness. From where it springs
(Where the huge mountain-range exalts so high
That seldom loftier peaks assault the sky
Even to where, to end its length, the sea
Cuts off Pelorum) till it finds at last
Its issue of repayment, rendering back
That which the heavens dry upward, and the streams
Return in season to the waiting sea,
In all its length, men own no enemy
More hated than is virtue: it to see,
As from a poisonous snake, they shrink aside.

'Either because the vale is cursed, or through
Inherited evil, those who dwell there lack
The natural virtues of their kind. It seems
That Circe feeds them. Where its stream is new,
Foul hogs are those accursed who populate
Its miserable banks, that galls should be
Their food: not acorns. nor a human meal.

Lower, to those who snarl, from those who squeal,
Its course descends, that with a quick disgust
It turns, as from a stench, rejecting curs
That yap beyond their power for injury.
Yet, as it broadens, more its evil fate
Befouls it: wolves for dogs its curse prefers.
And after that, as on through deep ravines
It seeks the sea's far favour, what remains?
Foxes for wolves at last, who fear no chains
But cunning fraud may loose them!

'What I say

I will not silence, though a stranger gleans.
The power of truth impels me. Well may he
Regard it, and remember. More I see.
It is thy grandson now whose bestial mood
Chases those wolves and scares them. Ravening there,
Along the wretched vale, their flesh he sells
While life is in them; or their slaughtering
He orders ruthless, as a man will doom
A beast grown old in service; life from them
And honour from himself he shreds away.
Bloodsoaked, emerging from the trampled wood,
He leaves it so that no millenium
Will cleanse it and replant it.'

As the word

Of one who of a frustrate future tells
Changes the countenance of him who hears,
Although he guess not whence the danger nears,
So saw I that the spirit's face who heard
Fell to a troubled sadness, as his thought
Digested his companion's speech. The sight
And hearing moved me that I hard besought

That they would tell me who they were. Whereat
The first made answer: 'Do you plead for that
Yourself refused to grant me? Yet the grace
Which brings thee here outshines so large a light
That it constrains me. When on earth I went
Guido del Duca was I called. My blood
Was so enraged with envy when I saw
A man grow prosperous, that all my face
Turned livid. Thus I sowed; and now the straw
Is mine to garner. Oh, ye mortal race!
Why will ye so debase your hearts that sight
And fellowship of your more fortunate kind
Becomes intolerable? . . . My comrade here
Is Rinier, once Calboli's boast, where none
Has heired his worth, and not his life alone
Is barren of good harvesting between
Po and the mountains, Reno and the sea;
But all throughout Romagna's bounds is seen
A growth of foul degenerate stocks, so lean
Of noble purpose that to cultivate
That land would be to hoe them. Who shall find
A Lizio now? Manardi, where is he?
Or Traversaro? Do you find again
Guy of Carpigna? O degenerate!
Sunk bastards of Romagna! Seek in vain
Throughout all Faenza, is a Bernard there? -
A son of Fosco, that most noble growth
Of humble root. . .

 'Tuscan, to see me weep
You shall not marvel, as my thoughts recall
Ugolin d'Azzo, Guy of Prata, they
Who were our house-companions. Throng they all
Back to remembrance, though my grief be loth.
Frederick Tignoso and his company:
The Traversaro, Anastagni - both
Great houses void and heirless now! I see
The cavaliers, the love, the courtesy,
The ladies, and the travails and repose,
High hearts and deeds, so sunk in infamy
That naught is left if Brettinoro goes,

Following his kinsmen, and a crowd who thence,
Self-exiled as the price of innocence,
Have left Romagna. Praise at least be thine,
Bagnacavallo, that no sons you bear!
And blamed be Castrocaro that an heir
It gives to its dishonour. Conio
Does worse in such begetting. More shall shine
Imola's fortune when its lord shall go
The Demon's natural way, but not so fair
That ever shall its record-scroll be bright
Beyond besmirching. One there is remains
- One name secure from blight of shaming stains -
Ugolin de Fantoli. For he left
No child who could degrade it . . . Tuscan, go!
The memories thou hast stirred give more delight
In tears than converse.'

So he spake, and we
Went onward, without guidance, confident
That though they saw not, hearing where we went,
They would have chided had we turned astray.

And then, like lightning through the air, our way
Was countered by a flying voice that cried:
'Whoever findeth me shall surely slay.'
And as it died upon our ears, there came,
Like thunder that pursues the lightning's flame,
Another voice that roared in deafening tone:
'I am Aglauros, who became a stone,'

And in the silence, as that thunder died,
I checked my steps, and to my patient Guide
Drew closer, while his chiding voice I heard:
'That was the bit which should be iron to keep
The man who feels it to the path; but you
Another bait have taken, and the hook
Of the old adversary so prevails
To draw you to him that no bridle now
Restrains, nor voice recalls you. In your view
The eternal heavens, at which you do not look,
Revolve with all their beauties, while your gaze,

Oblivious of their splendours, earthward turns,
Wherefore He scourges you, who all discerns.'

CANTO XV

Of the sun's sphere, which sways in passing by
Like a child's hoop that's trundled through the sky,
So much before the fall of evening lay
As from the third hour to the break of day.

There was the low sun of the afternoon,
While here had been the midnight. Now we met
The sun full-face, with blinking eyes, for we
So far had circled round the mount. I set
My hand to shade mine eyes, that such degree
Of light confronted, but I found the boon
Of shade denied.

'Sweet Father, wilt thou tell
How is it that the light assails me so
That naught can shade it, and it strikes as though
Reflected upwards? As when waters throw,
Or dazzling glass, the backward beam? Meseems
Itself advances on us.'

'Marvellous,'
He answered, 'are the heavenly lights as yet
Too unfamiliar vision. You fail to see
That not alone the sun's low radiance gleams;
But straightly on the path there comes to us
An angel sent to lead us. Soon will be
Confusion changed for comfort at the sight
Of Heaven's lucent hosts. Extreme delight
Will stir thee to thy nature's most extent
At such beholding.'

While he spake, we came
To that benignant angel. 'Enter here',
He called us with a joyful voice. We went
Upon a stair less steep than that below.
Beati *misericordes* chanted clear
Pursued us upward, and a song more near:
Rejoice that thou hast conquered.

Lonely now
We climbed, and I, with all my thoughts intent
On gaining wisdom from my Master's word,
Besought his exposition: 'Say what meant
That spirit of Romagna, when he spake,
Both of rejection and companionship?'

To which he answered: 'He the detriment
Of his own blemish so rebukes, that he
May have less cause for mourning. While desire
On finite and inferior food relies,
Where fewer feeders mean more bounteous fare,
Envy becomes a bellows to your sighs.
But if to Heavenly Love your hopes aspire
There lacks occasion for so base a fear.
The more there are, the wealthier each must be,
As more of that celestial charity
Burns in the crowded cloister.'

'That I hear,'

I answered, 'sounds so strangely in mine ear,
That being amply by thy wisdom fed,
I fast more keenly, and the doubt I knew
Is sharper than before. For how can good
Being to many hands distributed,
Endow them richlier than were it spread
Less thinly, totalled to a fortunate few?'

And he to me: 'Because your eyes you keep
Fixed downward to your earthly range, you reap
Darkness from light itself. The Eternal Good
Is both ineffable and infinite.
The more there are who in its rays unite,
The more its conflagration heats. The more
Of folk in Heaven whose souls have understood
Each other, in the light of Love Divine,
The more of love doth midst and round them shine,
As mirrors, each to each, reflected light
Cast to their own advantage.

'If from me

This truth you may not take, and sated see

Its prevalent wonder, Beatrice soon
Will be more potent with her words, and take
Not this alone, but all unsatisfied
Truth-hungers from thee. Only seek to bring
A diligent mind hereto, the final three
Of the five wounds to close, that sorrowing
Can heal, as twice already hath been.'

My Guide

I did not answer, though my thought replied:
'My heart is rested by thy words', for now
Our stair had to the next high gallery gained,
So that my wandering eyes my speech denied.

And at that instant, as it seemed, I knew
Ecstatic visions. Here a temple showed,
With moving groups about its doors, and one
Who with a mother's gesture called: 'My son,
Why hast thou disregarded? While that we
Have sought thee grieving?'

As she ceased, there feigned
A different sight. A woman frantic cried,
With lifted arms, and tears less misery
Distilled than indignation: 'Lord, if thou
Art truly regnant in this town, which erst
Caused strife of gods to name it, and hath gained
A later style more noble, seeing that now
Its fount of various knowledge sparkles high,
Wilt thou not venge me for those arms that dared,
Oh, Pisistratus, in an hour accursed,
Embrace my daughter?'

And that Lord replied
With temperate kindness: 'If we so condemn
A man who loves us, what is meet for them
Who work us evil?'

Then a crowd I saw
Fired with fierce hate, and voices shouted: 'Slay!'
And in their midst a youth was bound, and they
Hurled stones on him from every side, that he
Sank deathward, but his eyes were gates of prayer
Raised to an opening heaven, and from his lips,

Unstilled by scourging pains or life's eclipse,
Petitions for their pardon came, that so
Stirred pity to see it.

When my mind recurred
To external things (and yet which had not erred
Even in that it saw which was not there),
My Leader, who beheld me move as though
I waked from dreaming, for my comfort said:
'What ails thee that thou canst not firmly tread?
For half a league thy wandering feet have wound
Such devious patterns on the uncertain ground
As wine compels, or sleep inclines.'

And I:

'Oh, Father, if thine ear attend, I tell
The visions that impelled my mind to leave
My legs' control.'

To which he answered: 'Nay,
I read thee to thy smallest thought so well,
That not a hundred masks could hide. Believe
The sights thus granted were thy gain, that they
Should move thy heart, full-opened, to receive
The streams of peace abroad distributed
Wide from the eternal fount.

I did not ask

"What ails thee?" as might one whose earthly eyes
See nothing while his body dreaming lies,
But to impel thee on thy forward task
With diligent feet. Meet is it thus to press
The slothful who delay their wakefulness
From active use.'

As thus he spake, we went
Straight on to meet the sunset. Far ahead,
Level and low, its gleaming rays were spread.
But gradually across the light there came
A drifting smoke. It hid the sunset's flame.
Densely it darkened that clear firmament
Till we, reliefless in its folds confined,
Reft of pure air, were compassed, lost and blind.

CANTO XVI

Not hell's interior gloom, nor starless night
By densest clouds augmented, foiled my sight
As that enveloping smoke, nor felt a veil
So harsh of texture. nor so irritant,
So that mine eyelids could not long prevail
To lift against it. But my faithful Guide
His ready shoulder for my use supplied.
He said: 'Hold firmly. Do not leave my side,
And naught will harm thee.'

On we went, as goes
A blind man and his leader; he behind
A shortened pace, that naught that meets their way
May snare his feet, and holding, lest he stray,
His leader's hand. And as we went there rose
A murmur round us. Through the fetid air
'Oh, Lamb of God, who takes all sins away'
Rose from all sides the universal prayer.
With *Agnus Dei* every voice began,
So that it seemed a concord of desire:
One word, one measure.

'Master, these I hear
Are spirits' voices?'

'Surely so. Of ire
The knot they loosen.'

'Who art thou so near
Who talkest of us in a separate style,
As still for thee the months their process ran?'
So from the darkness came a voice. At which
My Guide enjoined me: 'Answer. Ask the while
If from this point we upward turn.'

And I:
'O Creature who thyself dost purify
So that thou mayst be fit for fair return
To Him who made thee, keep beside, and learn
A marvel I will tell thee.'

He to me:
'So far from here as heavenly laws permit
I will continue with thee. Smoke may hide
Our movements, but our voices will provide
An equal guidance.'

Then I answer made
To his first question: 'With that burden weighed
Which death alone releases climb I now.
So came I scatheless through Hell's weariness;
And if God's grace, having shown those depths, will bless
Mine eyes with comfort of His courts above,
Conceal not from me whom thou wast, and show
I pray, the path by which we upward go,
And be thy words our escort.'

'I,' said he,
'Was Marcus, called on earth of Lombardy.
Virtue I loved, toward which all men today
The bowstring slacken in lax hands. . . Thy way
Is straightly upward.'

Thus he spake, and then:
'I plead thy favour when thou mountest high
That I be mentioned in thy prayers.'

I said:
'I pledge thee that most surely; but my mind
Is pregnant with a bursting doubt. Before
I held it, and thy word confirms anew
Its subject. Surely is the world of men
A desert bare of virtue, overspread
With fecund evil. What I seek to find
Is sin's occasion to such depth. The more
My mind perceives, the better equipped am I
To point its source to others.'

I heard a sigh
Weighty with grief. 'Brother, the world is blind,
And surely art thou of it. You think to find
Occasions distant in the stars, as though
They rule the doings of men. If that were so,
Virtue should bring no joy, nor evil woe,
Having no freedom in their choice. You see
Events commenced from Heaven. But destiny
Is yours to shape thereafter. Good or ill
You have the light to choose, and human will
Shall overget encountered circumstance
If at the first it fail not. Power more high
And better nature will their strengths ally,

Creating in you that which destiny
Is futile to confound: the will to shape,
Or else endure. So if the world astray
Stumble to its destruction, do not try
To search excuses in the stars. More nigh
The occasion lies. In you the fault: in you
The diligent search should be. And therefore I
Gladly for thy instruction testify.

'Out from the Hand that loves it ere it be,
Comes forth the soul in bare simplicity,
A laughing, weeping child incontinent;
Ignorant of all except the keen desires
That its glad Maker gave. It turns intent
To that which pleases first. If guide nor bit
Withhold it from pursuit before it tires,
It spends itself for gains inadequate.
Hence is the need of laws restraining it;
And of a king who can at least discern
Of the true City the distant towers. Today
The laws exist. But who on earth are they
Who those firm rules enforce? Respect? Obey?
No man. The Shepherd, if he chew the cud,
His hooves are not divided. Those who learn
From partial lips some positive good, pursue
That only. On a single herb they feed,
Choking themselves with their unequal greed,
And seek no further; good to evil thus
Transforming by their own excess. The wrong
Is no inordinate defect of blood,
But evil guidance. Rome, one time who showed
Two suns which led the world by either road,
The temporal and eternal, now confounds
Those who perceive one only. In one hand
Are sword and crook, and by that unity
Are both enfeebled, having lost the fear,
Each for the other, that they ought to know.

'What seed will scatter from the fertile ear
But that which first was planted? Once the land

Watered by Po and Adige courtesy
Contained, and virtue thrived therein. But came
The wars of Frederick, and it sank so low
That those are most secure who think it shame
To neighbour men of clear integrity.
Three are there - three old men who yet remain,
In whom the ancient use rebukes the new.
Guy of Castel, and Gerard called the Good,
And Conrad of Palazzo. You may say,
In all men's hearing, that the Papal See
Through joining in herself two governments,
Falls in the mire, and in that fall befouls
Her burden and herself.'

'Your words explain,'

I answered, 'all I seek. I understand
Why Levi's sons received no heritage.
But tell, I pray, that Gerard, who is he
Whose life enduring from a nobler age
Reproves the baser?'

'Either,' he replied,

'Thy accent snares, or else thy heart hath planned
To try me, who in speech of Tuscany
Canst question thus, as being ignorant
Of whom I knew by that sole name, except
His daughter Gaia's.

'God be now your guide,

For I must go no further. Through the scant
Retiring fog, the first pale light you see;
And there the angel, not as yet for me,
Will meet you.'

Then he ceased to speak, and I
Called vainly through the mist without reply.

CANTO XVII

O reader, if on heights of Alpine snow
A mist hath wrapped thee of such density
That more than any mole thou couldst not see,
Recall how feeble and how white would show
The sun's pale entrance as the vapour thinned.

So will thy mind conceive how came to me
The sun which nightward now descended low.

Following my Master with close steps, I drew
Out to clear light at last. The sunset lay
Yet visible here, though sunk from sight to those
On the low shores beneath us.

Fantasy,

Which can so part us from external things
That not a thousand trumpets sounding shrill
Could rouse us - if not of ourselves it be,
Whence is it? Born of Light, by Heavenly Will,
Its power descends upon us.

She who sings,

Impious, in likeness of the bird which most
For sorrow in its song finds ecstasy,
First my imagination held: so still
My mind was mirrored on itself that naught
Intruded inward to divert its thought.

Next after Philomela came a sight
Of one who hung in torment crucified,
Yet haughty and despiteous while he died,
While round him grouped Ahasuerus stood,
Esther, and Mordicai called the Good,
Who was of speech unbending.

As will burst

A bubble, failing of its watery frame,
So passed this vision. In its place there came
A maiden, weeping anguished tears, who said:
'O Queen, why hast thou made this choice accurst,
Wrath-blinded? Not to lose Lavinia,
Thy own life hast thou lost; so losing me.
Mine is the grief, the bitter grief for thee.
Oh, Mother, for thy ruin must I weep
Much more than for another's.'

As when first

Strikes on a sleeper's eyes the light of day,
Scattering divisions of his broken sleep,
So these imaginations failed away

As on my face a greater glory fell
Than is the light of any earthly name.
And as I turned to seek its source, there came
A voice that cried: 'The ascent is here', Whereat,
Hearing its tone, desire within me rose
To gaze on him by whom those words were said,
As when insatiate hunger puts to flight
All other impulse till its need be fed.
But as the sun repels our feeble sight,
Hiding itself in its own excellence,
So fell my blinded eyes.

My Leader said:

'This spirit of God, who unsolicited
Directs us upward, his own light conceals
Beyond thine eyes' endurance. So he deals,
As for himself a man will choose. For he
Who knows the need and waits the spoken plea,
Unkindly on refusal's side is set.
But be you instant now to mount, for yet
Some little light remains, and only so,
While it continue, may we upward go.'

At that, and side by side, we took the stair,
And at the first step I became aware
Of a wing's motion past me, that the air
Stirred on my face. A voice said: '*Beati
Pacifci* who from evil wrath are free.'

But soon, too soon, the last faint rays so high
Rose from beneath that half the abandoned sky
Revealed its stars; and to myself I said:
'Oh, vigour, wherefore hast thou failed?' For lo!
My feet were useless to proceed. The stair
Had ended. Like two ships that drift ashore
We gained the circle's edge, but might no more
Till day released us.

'If we may not go,

Sweet Father, let me of thy wisdom share,
For all is silence round us. I would know
What sin doth this fourth circle purge away.'

Provides his pleasure. Last, is he whose shame
Makes him of reputations emulous,
Avid for retribution on the name
Beyond its worth exalted. Here below,
In fitting torments, these three sins lament.

Further it will be yours to contemplate
The faults that by wrong paces, fast or slow,
Pursue the good they lack not wits to know.
Dimly, confusedly, they apprehend
The Heaven that calls them, and they strive to win;
But with a love too weak. If by this sin,
This slackness of desire, your sloth offend,
Here, in the torments of this gallery,
After true penitence, your lot must be.

'Another good there is which brings no bliss.
It is not essence of the Good Divine,
The root and fruit of God's high mystery.
The love that doth too much for that resign
Bewails in those three circles after this.
But how tripartite is its form may be
Seen by thyself; and that I leave to thee.'

CANTO XVIII

My Teacher paused from the profundity
Of the close reasoning that he gave. Intent
He gazed upon me, searching deep to see
How far I understood, and how content
My mind became.

But I, who outwardly
Was silent, felt new thirst, yet said within:
'I may offend by importunity.'
But he, my Father, saw the timorous will.
He understood the wish it dared not tell,
And, speaking, gave me heart to speak, until
I answered fully: 'Master, clear and well
Thy exposition taught me, and my sight
Discerned thy reasons, livened by thy light;

And for that cause I pray thee, Father dear,
That thou interpret to me what may be
This love from which do all good works appear,
As also springs from it their contrary.'

'Direct the acuteness of thine intellect,'
He answered, 'on my words, and thou shalt see
Why the blind leaders that the blind select
Fall to the ditch. The soul, for love designed,
Impulsed by pleasure, will be swift to find
That which will please it to possess. Its power
Of apprehension will its object dower
With attributes alluring. If it move,
Bending in this compulsion, that is love:
Love, motioned upward like a rising fire,
That, till it gain the goal of its desire,
Will neither be subdued nor turned aside
Reposing only when the object sought
Its passion hath rejoiced and satisfied.
Behold how blind are these by whom is taught
That love, merely of itself, is laudable!
As though they were to say: "The wax is good:
Good therefore is the seal".'

'You feed me full,'

I answered, 'and my wit digests. I see
The nature and the manner of love. But yet
Before my mind a further doubt is set.
For if some outward object first inspire
Love's motion to its side, the feet that tire
Or hasten, on the straight or devious way,
Are rather by its object drawn than sent
Forth by the soul. And if this thing be so,
What is there in straight path, or steps astray,
Deserving of reward or punishment?'

And he: 'What reason tells, my words can show,
But further of these marvels wouldst thou know,
Then for Beatrice wait. For only she
With faith's far vision can enlighten thee.
But every spirit which itself unites

With tyrannous matter, one yet separate,
Virtue specific from God its core conceals,
Which it alone by use may demonstrate,
Solving itself, as every plant reveals
The separate virtue it from God receives
In the assertion of its own green leaves.

'The first cognitions, and the first desires,
Risen from a source that no man knows, imply
No guilt, and earn no merit. As the bee
Moves to the flower, so man instinctively
Moves to each succour that his life requires.
But in each heart God sets a sentinel,
A faculty of counsel, that should dwell
Upon the threshold of assent. Desert
Begins as this is active to deny
Or grant the clamours of desire, as they
Be innocent or guilty.

 'Those who search
The deep foundations of all truth have found
This natal liberty of choice, whereby
They leave morality to the world. Allow
That every impulse that you feel is born
Of uncontrollable necessity,
Beyond your own prevention; yet remains
That in you is the power that either chains
Or else releases. This high faculty
Will thy Beatrice call free-will. Beware
That you forget not this, lest she declare
Some following wisdom which you might not see.'

The moon's slow course, at night's meridian
Made scant the stars, as she pursued her way
Along the track her consort takes when he
Shows to the Roman his retiring ray
Between Sardinia and Corsica,
While now we stood beneath her gibbous glow
Where he, that Shade by whose reflected fame
Pietola has gained a greater name
Than Mantua's larger town, had cast away

The load that overbore me. Wherefore I,
Replete with so much wisdom, seemed as one
Who drowns where he stands. But soon was done
That dreaming when behind our backs there rose
A clamorous outcry's swift advance. As when
Ismenus and Asopus heard by night
The furious trampling of a horde of men
Along their banks, and knew, by that wild rite,
That Thebans needed Bacchus, so there ran
Along the circle's curve a hurrying crew
Ridden hard by goodwill and virtuous love.

Swiftly they came, and voices cried aloud
Amid their weeping. Two in front proclaimed:
'How quickly Mary to the mountain ran!'
And: 'Caesar once, Ilerda to subdue,
Struck at Marseilles, and ere his foemen knew
Had entered Spain.' And other of the crowd,
Jostling behind, cried: 'Hasten! Hasten all!
From insufficient love let love's pursuit
Not slacken, and the power of grace recruit
From strain to reach it.'

 'Ye in whom desire
Is fervent to repair past negligence,
Regard this man, on whom - I do not lie -
The burden of flesh remains. For we require
The upward path, which, with the sun's return,
He has permission to take.'

 My Leader said
These words, and one replied: 'If thou wouldst learn
The passage, follow. We may not pause. The will
For motion drives us. Pardon that, to thee
Which is not, but may seem, discourtesy.
Saint Zeno's abbot was I once, and knew
Verona under Redbeard's rule, whom still
Milan bewails. One is there now who stands
With one foot in the death-pit, who shall soon
Bewail that monastery, and lament
That he possessed its rule, because his son,
Baseborn, corrupt of body and more of mind,

He gave its truer pastor's place: ill done,
And evil in its issue.'

 If more he said

I know not, for already far behind
Were we, and lost the whirling words, but this
I pleased to hear. And he, at every need
My nurse, again addressed me 'Turn thee: heed
These two, who give to sloth the ruling bit';
Whereat I heard them. In the rear they ran,
And shouted: 'Those who saw the seas divide
To give them passage, in their sloth they died
Before the chosen heirs to Canaan came.'
And: 'They who would not, with Anchises' son,
Toil to the end, they bought a life of shame
With that reluctance.'

 Died the hurrying feet

In distance lost. The quiet dark again
Resumed around us. But my mind's retreat
Was on itself, and till the night was done
I musing stood, as one who dreams complete,
Thought on the heel of thought so closely came.

CANTO XIX

When came the hour at which the moon's domain
Is coldest, all the last day's genial heat
By Saturn vanquished, or by Earth; and when
The geomants watch their Greater Fortune gain
The eastern sky, which not the night's retreat
Will long expose, a dream approached me then,
A woman crooked in deformity,
Squint-eyed, and stammering in her speech, with hands
Ill-shaped to make caresses, and her hair
It seemed disease had whitened. Such to see
Was little bliss, but as the light expands
With morn, and the chilled limbs their strength renew
Which night hath stiffened, so my gaze on her
Had power for her transforming. Straight and tall
She rose, and soft swift speech, and eyes of love,
She gave, and in her face the warm blood beat,

Even as desire would have it. I could not stir
Mine eyes from that regard. Her speech was sweet
As song, and song became. 'I am,' she sang,
'I am that siren who the seaman charms
In distant ocean. Not to heed would wrong
The fountains of delight. To find my arms
I turned Ulysses once. Who once belong
To what I gave them will but seldom go.
Such peace I give.'

She had not ceased her song
When came another of a different hue,
Alert to foil her, holy and austere,
'Virgil,' who cried, 'behold, what meet we here?'
And he came forward in my dream, as though
He saw this last one only, on the first,
Rude hands who laid, and tore her garments through,
Opening her before, and showed her belly bare.
Whereat there issued from that womb accursed
Such stench as waked me.

'Three full times,' he said,
'Already have I called thee. Rise and come,
To find the gateway to the next ascent.'
I rose at that, of heaven's high light aware
That flooded the sacred mount as on we went,
The new sun shining on our reins; but yet,
As one the burden of his thought has bent,
I moved in shape a bridge's half. I heard
A voice: *Come hither*. Never mortal word
Contained such sweetness or benignity,
And he who spake, with swanlike wings outspread,
A pathway through the flinty ramparts led.
And while between the walls we climbed, his wings
Fanned and sustained us. 'Those who mourn,' said he,
'Are blessed, for the sense of guilt shall be
The road to consolation.'

Then to me
My guide spake sharply: 'Why with eyes downset
So long dost thou continue?'

'Memory brings
The vision of sleep, and will not let me be.'

'Hast thou,' he asked, 'that ancient siren seen
Who only upward from this point hath been
The source of lamentations? Hast thou seen
The rescue that relieves? Suffice it thee.
Spurn from thy waking thought the earthly clay,
And turn thine eyes to where the Eternal King
Casts the great circles of his lure.'

Thereat,

As the perched falcon, who the while before
Looked down unmotioned, stretches throat and wing,
By hunger wakened from his dreams, so I
The fetters of that vision cast, and bore
A different aspect as I climbed, until
The fissure ended, and again the flat
Exposed another circle gained. I saw
A folk with faces to the ground that lay,
In tears and lamentations. Sobs would stay
The course of speech, and when their words had way,
'*Adhaesit pavimento*' - so I heard -
'*Anima mea.*' With the spoken word
Sighs strove for previous exit. 'O Elect,
Whose sufferings hope and justice join to make
Less hard, I pray thee hence our steps direct
Toward the ascent.' So Virgil asked, and one
Some paces forward answered: 'If ye move
Exempt from this reclining, and would find
The speediest passage, ye should turn to prove
The way by which your right hands outward are.'

The hidden speaker drew my glance, from whom
I turned it to my Guide, whose gesture gave
Full freedom to the prayer that left my mind,
With but mine eyes to speak it.

'Spirit,' I said,

Bending above the prostrate form, 'suspend
A moment's space those urgent tears to shed,
By which alone man cometh to God, and tell
Of whom on earth thou wast, and why thy face
So fronts the dust, and I will serve thee well,

If aught thou wouldst on earth, from whence I came,
Whose human life continues.'

Answered he:

'The cause that thus our prostrate forms extends
I do not hide, but first is meet to show
To whom thou speakest. Peter's robe was mine.
My race's name the waters gave that flow
Between Siestri and Chiavari.
Short weeks I learned how hard that mantle weighs
To whom its fringes from the mire would raise,
That all beside is weightless. Near its end
My life advanced, before the light divine
Shone on me to conversion. Pontiff crowned,
I stood where I could mount no more. I found
The falsehood of the life I lived: I learned
No heart to peace its own disquiet can bring.
I stood so high that I could mount no more;
And then I first looked upward. Till that day,
To earth my avaricious eyes were turned,
Separate from God by mine own sundering,
Most miserable and most accursed. And here
The bitter price with these around I pay.
There is no worse in all the mount. Before,
We did not lift our earthward eyes, and now
Our faces and our outstretched limbs must lie
Pressed to the earth which once we priced so high.
Our avarice held us from the high pursuit
Of noble and desirable things, to bend
In futile labour for no worth, whereby
We earned our own prostration. Here extend
Our limbs held firmly to the earth until
The eternal Justice grants release.'

He ceased,

And I, who knelt beside him now, began
To answer, but he heard my voice, and knew
The meaning of its nearness. 'Say what ill
So bends thee from thy natural height?'

'For you,'

I answered, 'reverence sinks my knees.'

'Released

From folly, brother, let them rise.' he said,
'For earthly difference count not with the dead.

God's values are not of the mind of man.
What image and inscription have we here?
Thou hadst not doubted that we here unite
In equal reverence to one Power. . . But go,
I pray thee, quickly, for the longer stay
Disturbs my weeping. Every hour's delay
Prolongs my penance; I would bring to fruit
The thoughts that from thy words are born. . . I know
None left of all my house whose prayers could be
Potent to reach the eternal heavens for me,
Unless Alagia's natural virtues rise
Superior to her kindred's perfidies.'

CANTO XX

Against strong will, doth feebler will contend?
Back from the stream I drew a sponge unfilled.
To please my Guide I let my pleasure end,
And followed as his firmer purpose willed,
A narrow way along the imminent edge.

For they who through their blinded eyes distilled
The evil which is this world's master, lay
So numerous that across the path they spread,
Hindering our steps and little space was ours
Between them and the depth.

Accursed be thou,
Old shewolf, ravening with insatiate maw!
Who more than all hell's hunting beasts may claim
The number of thy victims. Still unfed
Thou howlest while thy fathomless hunger feeds.

O stars, in whose control of mortal needs
Men half believe, by your transmuting powers,
When comes he who shall end her?

Now we went
On the rough ledge with hindered steps and slow,

My mind the while on those sad shades intent
Who wept beside us. One I chanced to hear
Who wailed as doth a woman when most intense
The pangs of travail.

 'Sweet Mary, all may see
How poor thou wast, by that mean hostelry
In which thou didst thy sacred load bestow.'
Followed a voice: 'O good Fabricius,
Virtue thou didst prefer with poverty
Rather than wealth with crime.'

 So fair to me
These accents sounded that, the last to know,
I sideward moved. That dower which Nicholas
Gave the three maidens lest their dearth should be
Their shame's occasion was he speaking now.

'O Spirit,' I said, 'whose speech so fragrant sounds,
Disclose, I pray thee, who thou wast, and why
Thou dost of these old virtues testify,
While others silent take their doleful rounds.
Thou shalt not this to me rewardless show
If Heaven again my earthly life allow.'

And he: 'I answer, not in hope that thou
Wilt recompense my words, but that I see
The heavenly favour that hath guided thee.
Root was I of that plant malevolent
That now makes shadow of the Christian lands.
Seldom it gives good fruit to reaching hands;
But if with Ghent the power of vengeance lay,
Or Lille its hate could batten, or Douai
Or Bruges, there were not long to wait its fall.
Capet my name. A butcher's son was I.
From me are France's kings in long descent,
Even to now.

 'When the ancient line decayed,
Save only one the sombre cowl who wore,
Within my hands the reins of government
Were fixed so firmly, with such power to make
Accretions further, and such strength of friends,

That for my son the vacant crown to take
Was natural sequence. Hence from me descends
The unbroken line of consecrated bones.

'Until the bridal dowry of Provence
My race exalted, little worth or ill
Was theirs. But, raised by that aggrandisement,
Began its rapine and chicanery.
In turn it raped Ponthieu and Normandy,
And Gascony thereafter. Turning thence,
Charles of Anjou invaded Italy,
Lured by Apulia's bait, and for amends
Destroyed Conradin. In the same pretence
He forced Saint Thomas take his heavenly crown.

'I see another Charles, another day
Not distant, come from France to win renown
Without war's weapons. In his hands, the lance
That Judas used for jousting, now to burst
The paunch of Florence. Therefore shame will he
Gain, and not land. The less he counts the sin,
More grievously will be his name accursed
By those who speak it.

 'He whom next I see
Of the same name, hath known captivity
Already, haled from his surrendered ship.
I see him bargain for his daughter's price,
As do the corsairs for the slaves they sell.
What further degradation, Avarice,
Canst thou inflict upon our race? For we
Trade our own flesh for gold the merchants tell.

'But, that past evil may seem less, and less
The evil of the future, hear ye this:
I see Alagna, and the fleur-de-lys
Enter, and under its gay sign is led
Christ, in His vicar's person. Him I see
Twice mocked. The vinegar and the gall are there.
And between living thieves the victim dead.

'I see the second Pilate's cruelty,
By this high crime unsated, urge him on
Yet further. Now his greedful sails are spread
Against the Temple. Lord, how long shall be
The time of waiting for Thy wrath? How soon
Rejoice I in Thy vengeance, loosed from out
Its place beneath Thy throne?

 'The words I said
Which first you queried were the ordered prayer
Which in the daylight all must use; but when
The darkness deepens other cries recur.
Our voices will recall Pygmalion then,
Betrayed by gluttony of gold to be
Traitor and thief and parricide. We tell
The avaricious Midas' misery,
Whose granted boon became the jest of men;
Of Achan's folly is our speech, who stole
The spoils, ginned by the wrath of Joshua;
We scorn Sapphira, and her husband too;
We praise the kicks that Heliodorus knew;
And circles all the mount that infamy
When Polymnester Polydorus slew.
Lastly, united in one voice we cry:
"O Crassus, tell us, was it sweet to try
The savour of gold? For surely thou shouldst know."

'Thus varied is our talk, now loud now low,
As fervour spurs us.

 'If one voice you heard,
Chance was it. Others with an equal word
At other moments might as loudly cry.'

Our steps had left him, and the difficult way
Resumed, when all the mount I felt to sway
So mightily, that chilled with fear was I,
As one may be to execution led.
For surely less was Delos shaken, ere
Her nest did Leda make therein to bear
The twins of heaven; and rose so loud a cry
That my kind Master to me turned, and said:

'Doubt naught. I guide thee.'

Then around me rose,
Clear heard, and far in further volume lost,
From such unnumbered voices joined: 'To God
Be glory *in excelsis*.'

When that cry
First sounded in the shepherds' ears, they lay
Silenced and awed thereby, and stilled as they
Now stood we till it ceased, and after that
Our way resumed. But never yet was I,
If memory serve me, in such thirst to learn
That which I knew not, nor so diffident
To ask it; for my Guide, who would not turn,
As though oblivious of my longing, went
Swiftly ahead, and I must toil behind,
Beset with problems in a timorous mind.

CANTO XXI

That thirst of man which is not satisfied,
Save by the living water Christ supplied
To her who asked Him at Samaria's well,
Was working in me while the hindered way
I followed, hasting as my Master led,
And sorrowing for the dreadful punishment
That justice dealt around me.

Where we went
There came a Shade behind us. As the two
(So Luke relates it) journeying on the way,
By Christ were overtaken, after He
Had burst the bondage of the tomb, he drew
Beside us, gazing on the misery
Of those upon the path who prostrate lay.
And as we did not speak, he spoke to us:
'Brethren, God's peace be yours', and Virgil then,
Making the sign such greeting calls, replied:
'May the Just Court which doth for me provide
An everlasting exile, give to thee
Peace in the concord of the blest.'

'But how,'

The Shade exclaimed, 'if of such sort are ye
As God esteems unworthy, come ye now,
And in what escort, to ascend His stairs?'

To whom my Teacher (and the while he spake
We struggled stoutly not to fall behind):
'If thou regard this man, and how he bears
Those marks upon him which the Angel drew,
Thou wilt perceive it meet that he should take
His place at last amidst the elect. As yet
He is not of our sort, for she who spins
Without remission, hath not drawn his skein.

And therefore as his soul (which kindred is
To thine and mine) could not attain alone
This passage, seeing not as we can see,
Through Hell's wide throat I was released to be
His escort upward. Higher must I set
His feet before I leave. But canst thou say
Why did this mount to its foundations sway,
With general outcry as the day began?'

So sought he reading of that mystery,
Piercing the needle's eye of my desire
Which yet I had not spoken, wherefore hope
Reduced the craving of my thirst.

To him

That blessed one replied: 'This mountain stands
Inviolate to all passions felt below;
Nor rain, nor wind, nor hail, nor frost, nor snow
Can move it. Not the assault of ice or fire
Can pass the short flight of three steps whereby
The porter sits. No cloud, or dense or dim,
No lightning's dreadful splendour, nor the glow
Of beauty seen in Iris' wandering bow,
This mount can scale. Although it shake below
When Earth's loosed winds (how loosed we do not know)
Rage round it, here it rests, serene, unaware,
Unmoved by that which makes commotion there.

'Only when, conscious of its purity,
Some soul makes motion to ascend, the mount
Quakes in response; and that exultant cry
Applauds its passage. Its prevailing will
For such ascensions proves its fitness. Free
It had been from the first its company
To choose, but with a will too weak, as when
Against reluctance had it sinned before.

So sought it, as the sin, the pain until
Self-conscious of its cleansing. From that woe
Where I had lain five hundred years and more
I felt release, and my free will required
A better threshold. Therefore did ye feel
The earthquake; and the acclaiming cries which choired
My freedom sounded in your ears. They praise
Delivering mercy. May He shortly raise
Them also.'

Thus he spake. The more that thirst
Is bitter, drinking gives the more delight.
How much my profit from the things I heard
I will not scheme to tell. I lack the word
The occasion needs.

But my wise Leader said:

'I thank thee. Clearly how the snare is set
Your words disclose, and how you break the net,
And why the mount quakes, and the voices hail
The fact of thy releasing. I would know
If more it please thee to disclose, with whom
I talk, and why did so long time prevail
To hinder thy ascension.'

'At the hour

When Titus, aided by the Heavenly Power,
Avenged the blood by Judas sold, my name,
Which sought our highest and most lasting fame,
Was earliest heard. A Neapolitan
I was; but Rome my voice required, and drew
Me to her, and my brows with myrtle bound.
Of great Achilles and of Thebes I sang.
Staius I was. The over-rising flame

That waked and warmed my ardour was the same
A thousand others have felt. I need not say,
I mean the Aeneid, which was nurse to me
In all the art I loved: my certain stay,
Or else I had but stumbled. Could I see
My Master, or have lived on earth when he
Walked visible there, I would this hour agree
Another year of torture yet to bear.'

At this my Leader turned a face to me
Which said 'Be silent'; but can virtue wear
An absolute mask? For tears and laughter spring
So swiftly from the passions each portrays
That he who most his natural moods would bring
To firm subjection, yet at times obeys
A feeling's impulse. Though my lips were still,
I smiled as one who signals, and the Shade
Gazed in mine eyes, where most the soul betrays
The thought unspoken.

'As you hope to bring
Labour to consummation, tell me now
Why, for an instant, did thy thoughts allow
A sign of laughter on thy lips?'

And I
Stood silent, but discovered. On one side
Was one would have me speak what one would hide
At equal nearness.

But my Master saw
My snare, and gave permission: 'Speak, and show
That which he urges. Have no fear of me.'

Whereat I spake: 'O Spirit of ancient days,
You wondered that I smiled, but you shall know
A greater marvel for a greater praise.
For This who guides me through these wards is he
From whom thine inspiration came to sing
Of gods and heroes. If thou didst conclude
I heard thy worship with a thought more rude,
Reject it wholly, as a thing untrue.
I smiled that he should stand so close to you

The while that you protested.'
He thereat
Scarce heard to my conclusion. Falling flat,
His hands embraced my Leader's feet, but he
Rebuked him: 'Brother, if thou wilt, forbear.
Recall it to thy mind that shades are we.'
At which that other rose: 'Then canst thou see
How great my love, that caused me to forget
The emptiness that now for flesh we wear,
Possessed by but one thought, to reverence thee.'

CANTO XXII

Already distant had we left below
The Angel who our upward course had set
To the sixth circle, clearing from my brow
One stroke the more; and we had heard him bless
Those whose desire is justice. *Sitiunt*
His voices had proclaimed, and I, who less
Sin's burden hindered than before, could now
Keep easy pace with the swift spirits' ascent,
And heed their converse.

First my Master said:

'Love, fired by virtue that it emulates,
Will ever find its ardour likely met,
So only that itself appear; wherefore,
When Juvenal entered Hell's exterior gates,
To join us where our quiet place is set,
And told me thine affection, not till then
Had I experienced so warm regard
For one who, living in the world of men,
Or in the place beneath, I had not met.
Short will it make these steps for me. But say,
(And grant the pardon that a friend will give,
Encountering friendship, if I ask too far),
How could the sin of avarice in thee live
Beside the wisdom that thy studious day
Had stored so richly?'

Laughter fugitive
Passed from the lips that answered: 'Every word

I hear thee speak is love's dear evidence.
But often aspects hide the things that are,
And from presumptions false, false doubts are bred.
Your question shows belief that mine offence
Was avarice, as the circle indicates
In which I stayed to suffer. But too far
I put it from me: opposite was my guilt
From that which you supposed it.

'When I read
That passage in thy works where thou dost cry,
As though in passionate reproach against
Our weak-reined nature: "Sane parsimony!
Why canst thou not to frugal use restrain
The wasting hand?" then vision came, to see
The impious folly of the course I led.
Else had I ended on a harder bed,
Joined ever in the woeful jousts below.

'How many will arise with shortened hair
Because they will not own this sin, nor tear
It from them, even in their latest hour!
Behold, the danger of extremes I show.
For who sin's opposite shall for virtue dress
Will find it baneful in its own excess
As that which it resisteth. Therefore I
Six thousand moons did in that circle lie
Where those for avarice doomed repent, although
I sinned by reason of its contrary.'

My singer of bucolic strains replied:
'Yet, though I may not doubt that this be so,
A further question enters. When thy song
Was of the bitter war Jocasta knew
With two-fold sorrow, then thy loyalty
Was Clio's. Faithless to a faith more true,
Works only could not save thee. How and when
Thereafter did what light in darkness shine
To guide thy sails toward the Fisher of Men?'

And he to him: 'Thou wast it, first and next.

First to Parnassus, in its caves to drink,
Thy light had led me. After, up to God,
The same light lengthened on the heavenly road.
Thou wast as one who walks a lightless way,
But bears a torch behind him, so that they
Who follow by that wisdom learn which he
Found unavailing. When I read thy text:
"The world renews itself: again to man
Justice returns, and a new progeny
Descends from Heaven", then the light began
To shine which made me Christian. First through thee
I learnt the art of verse, and after that
The art of holiness. That thou mayst see
The truth herein, I will not outline this,
But add convincing colour.

 'True belief,
Sown by the eternal purpose, teemed around.
I read thy word, and saw its harmony
With that new faith the preachers taught; whereat
I went the more to hear them. When their grief
I witnessed, by Domitian scourged, my tears
Were theirs, so much I prized their holiness.
The station in the world I held I found
Not impotent to aid them. Less and less
Contending faiths I valued, as I saw
The upright precepts of the sacred law.
And in my poem, ere the Greeks arrived
Upon the river of Thebes, my choice was cast.
Christian I was baptised; but till the last
I kept it secret with a pagan show;
And for this cowardice the fourth ring below
I traversed longer than a century.

'I pray thee now, to whom these debts I owe,
While still the ascent is ours, that thou wilt show
In what more hopeful place, or cleft of Hell,
Terence, Caecilius, Plautus, Varro, dwell.'

My Leader answered: 'These, and more beside
Thy thoughts would query, in that place abide

With Persius and myself, that Greek around
Whom more than all the Muses nursed. We dwell
In the first circle of the gateless Hell.
And oft we talk of that far mount which yet
Those Muses will not leave. Euripides
Is comrade there, and there is Antiphon,
And others whom the laurel circlets crowned
In Greece's loftier noon. There Agathon,
And there Simonides. Antigone
Argia, Deiphyle, and Ismene,
Sad as she lived, are there. Hypsipyle,
Who led Adrastus' host to Langia's spring:
Tiresias' daughter, Deidamia
Is there, and Thetis.'

More they did not say,
For now we issued from the steep ascent,
And they in looking round were more intent
Than on the thoughts that cheered the upward way.
Already the four hand-maids of the day
Were left behind, and at the chariot's pole
Upward the fifth its blazing point advanced,
The while my careful Leader round him glanced,
And counselled: 'Now I think behoves that we
Turn our right shoulders to the edge, and so
Circle the mountain as we did below.'

So usage proved our guide, and more content
Were we therewith that still beside us went
The spirit released. And as their talk resumed
I went behind and silently, my mind
So solaced by their words the mood to sing
Was in me stirred.

But soon our journeying
Met that which broke their converse. In mid road
A tree with apples ripe and sweet to smell
Opposed us. As a firtree's girth we find
Diminished upward, so, reversed, did this
Broaden as it ascended. Thus designed,
I judged, that none might climb it. From the side
On which the mountain rose, a liquid stream

Fell on it, drenching all its leaves. The two
Whose voices I had harkened nearer drew,
On which a voice from out the branches cried:
'Dearth, if ye eat this fruit, your food shall be.'

And then the voice continued from the tree:
'More did it in her thoughts to Mary seem
That all the wedding should be fitly set
And furnished forth than that rich wines should wet
The lips which answer now for you. And they,
The Roman matrons of old time, would stay
Their thirst with water. Daniel counted naught
The price of food, if wisdom might be bought
With the same coin. The earliest age of men
Had golden beauty of simplicity:
Acorns were sweet, and brooks were nectar then.
And so John Baptist in the wilderness
Ate honey and locusts only - wherefore he,
The greatness of abstention to express,
Is glorious in the gospel's imagery.

CANTO XXIII

While with fixed eyes I stood, by what I heard
Arrested there, and searched the leaves as he
Who wastes his days to watch the building bird,
My more than Father spake such words to me
As turned attention quickly: 'Son,' he said,
'Let not the time be ill distributed
That Heaven allows us. Come.' My pace thereat
Hastened behind them, not reluctantly,
Having their talk to draw me.

As we went

I heard one weep and chant, that his lament
Was joy and sorrow at once. 'Sweet Father, say,
Labia mea Domine, what is that?'
'Shades,' he replied, 'perchance are these, who go
Loosening the knots they tightly bound below.'

As do the pilgrims when they overtake

Some strangers moving slower on the way
Turning their eyes, although they will not stay
One forward step, so did these shades to us,
Turning their glances, mild, inquisitous,
On the strange sight we were. The eyes of all
Showed dark in chalkwhite faces cavernous,
And from the bones the skin took shape. I thought
Not Erisichthon, being left with naught
But bare starvation in his empty hide,
Was equally by thirst and hunger dried.
Within myself I said: Lo, these are they
Who lost Jerusalem, when Mary's teeth
Tore at her son. Projecting brows beneath
The sockets of their eyes as rings appeared
From which the gems had fallen. Who should say,
Lacking the key, how any fruit so fair,
Or stream so limpid, thus should leave them bare?

So thought I, and the cause had sought, but then
A shade who passed us turned its bony head,
And from its hollow caverns stared, and said:
'What grace do I behold?'

The face alone

Had never taught me, from the world of men
Too greatly changed, but the familiar tone
Recalled it. Then Forese's altered mouth
I saw; and then again the face I knew.

'Ah, look not on my scabby skin,' he pled,
'Or on protruding bones. Forget my drouth
To tell me truly of thyself, and who
Those others.'

But mine own impatience said:

'Not greatlier when I wept to see thee dead
My sorrow shook me, than I weep to see
Thy face so altered. In God's name, to me
Reveal thy torture. My much marvelling
Forbids that speech to other use I bring
Until thou showest me this.'

And he to me:

'The eternal counsel wills it. Its decree
Gives virtue to the water and the tree
To emaciate thus. All this lean folk you see,
Who weep at once and sing, so expiate
Their gluttonous days. A scent so odorous
Comes from the apples, and the stream that falls
Through the green shadows, as, our thirst to sate
And hunger, maddens us to devour; and thus
It leaves us empty. More than once, the while
We make the circle, doth this sight beguile
To futile feeding. So our pain renews.
Pain said I? Solace were a word more fit.
For there the Holy Purpose leads, as It
Led Christ beforetime to a bitterer tree
To cry at last with gladness: *Eli*. He
Having our ransom thus accomplished.'

I answered him: 'Forese, since you died
Five years are barely ended. If the power
For thy particular sin had in thee dried
Before the sorrow of the kindly hour
Which leads us Godward, how, in time so brief,
Art thou advanced so highly? I had thought
To find thee lower, where what time hath wrought
Of evil, finds in time its slow relief.'

He answered: 'Nella, with her weeping grief,
My Nella, in short space hath brought me here,
With the sweet wormwood to be plagued. Her prayers
Assailing Heaven, have brought me from the shore
Of waiting souls, and up succeeding stairs
To this high circle. She, to me so dear,
Is loved of God; and that, methinks, the more
Because she keeps her widow's chastity,
Solacing with good works her days. For where
I left her in Barbagia, surely there
Are lewder women than Sardinia knows
In its more wild Barbagia, convict-bred.

I see a time, and that few years ahead,

When from the pulpit shall stern words be said
In sharp refusal of its rites to those
Who overboldly to the church repair
With pert protruding breasts, and nipples bare.

'What women of the coast of Barbary,
What eastern pagans have there been, or be,
Who must be by their church, or man, coerced,
To keep them covered? But if well they knew,
These dames of Florence, what the heavens prepare,
The sheaf which now is bound to scourge them, there
Wide would they open mouths to howl their woe.
For be my foresight, as I deem it, true,
He will not grow to clothe his cheeks with hair
Who now is comforted with lullaby
Before they meet their grief.

 'But, brother, now
Delay not my desire to gratify.
Thou seest that it is not only I,
But all these people round us gaze as one
To marvel at thy form, which screens the sun.'

Wherefore I answered: 'If thou wilt recall
What thou wast once with me, and I with thee,
Grave will be still the present memory
Of that from which my Leader here returned
My recent steps. On that near yesterday,
When the sun's sister showed her face in full,
He brought me through the dreadful night where they,
The truly dead, continue. This true flesh
Still wearing, his support hath led me here,
Circling this mount where ye are beaten straight
Whom earthly life made crooked. Still will be
His upward guidance mine, until I see
The high place where Beatrice waits me. He
Who leads me there is Virgil; and the shade
Is he at whose release the mountain swayed.'

CANTO XXIV

Words not for pace nor pace for words delayed,
But while we talked a steady course we made,
As moves a good ship with the wind behind.
And those pale shades who seemed for death designed
Twice over, from their hollow eyepits gazed
In wonder at me as they moved, aware
That in the flesh a mortal man was there,
While I continued what I said before:
'He might advance his upward progress more,
I doubt not, but that his reluctant will
Declines to leave my Leader. But, I pray,
If any of these passing folk who still
Devour me with their eyes deserve remark,
Disclose them to me. . . If thou knowest, say
Where is Piccarda?'

First he answered that
Which last I asked: 'My sister, fair and good,
- I know not which was more, or which was less,
Her righteous living or her loveliness -
Already triumphs, glorying in her crown. . .
It is allowed to name us, since our fare
Obliterates every line of what we were.
That one' - his finger pointed - 'that one there
Is Bonagiunta, he of Lucca. He
Beyond, with face more seamed than all beside,
Is he who had the Holy Church for bride,
Who came from Tours, and now who expiates
The eels that once in wine he drowned.'

He told
Of others round, one after one, and all
Content that I should know them. None thereat
Returned a surly gesture. Two I saw
So drained by hunger that the craving maw
Caused them to clash their teeth on emptiness.
La Pila's Ubaldino one, and one
Boniface, who with pastoral staff controlled
So many lands before. I saw Marchese,
Who once at Forli, when his thirst was less,
Was discontent that ever thirst was done.
But I, as he who doubts and then decides,

To Bonagiunta turned, as seemed that he
Was most of these inclined to speak to me.
And from those lips that justice parched I heard
A muttered sound: 'Gentucca.' To the word
I answered: 'Spirit, who seemest of the mood
Inviting converse, wilt thou speak, that I
May understand, and each may satisfy
The other with their thoughts.'

And he thereto

Replied: 'My city other mouths may blame,
But thou shalt come to praise it, pleased by one,
A woman born therein, too young as yet
To wear the wimple. Take this presage true;
And if my muttered word thy ear misled,
A later day shall clear it. . . But thy name,
For sure I know thee, is on earth renowned
As who that different style of rhyming set:
"Ladies who have of love discovery made".'

And I to him: 'I seek to write unbound
By aught but Love's inspiring. Unafraid
Of broken precedent, as He dictates
The rhymes I fashion.'

'Brother, now I see

The rope that tripped Lentino's notary,
Guittone, and myself. We strove to teach
Too straight a rule, whereby we did not reach
Love's ultimate sweetness, by our quaint pretence
Trammelled, nor yielding full obedience
To His dictation. He who intricate wile
Prefers to matter, will not reach the style
That most excels.'

He ceased, as one content
With mind disburdened.

Gathering for the Nile,
Birds that from winter flee assemble first
In hesitant groups, and then, in lengthened file,
Fly swiftly on their chosen course. So went
The folk around us now. Their faces turned;
Their speed increased to double nimbleness

By earnest purpose, and by fleshless frames.
But as a breathless racer slacks his pace,
Letting his comrades more advance until
The weary panting of his chest is still,
So did Forese with the holy train,
Continuing beside me. 'When again,'
He asked, 'shall I behold thee?'

'Naught,' I said,
'Is shown me of the time I take to die,
But soon or late, my wish would see me dead
Much sooner; in such evil place am I,
Where good from day to day declines, and ill
Presages ruin.'

'With a better will,'
He answered, 'go thy way, for I can see
The end of whom has heaviest blame, and him
A beast with ignominy, at its tail,
Drags ever faster to the fatal vale,
Where there is no forgiveness. Hard its feet
Strike backward: vilely is his body spread.
Those wheels' (and here to Heaven he raised his head)
'Have little further space to turn before
All this, more clearly than my speech can say,
Yourself will witness. . . Now I charge thee stay;
For time is precious, and too much delay
Is mine already, level pace to keep
With those from whom I should not lag.'

As one
Who on the front of war will urge his steed
Out from the moving ranks, that he may reap
The honour of the first assault, so he
Rushed forward. Only were the two with me
Who were on earth my Masters. So mine eyes
Pursued him as my mind his words, and so
I saw, before we reached, another tree,
An apple, like the first, and bending low
Its branches, laden. Very near were we
When first it came in sight; the mountain's curve
Till then concealing. Many folk I saw
Around it raise appealing hands, although

Their words escaped me. Clamorous children so
With eager vain petitions will surround
One who declines to grant, but from the ground
Holds up the bauble they desire, too high
For reaching hands, and yet doth not deny,
Nor by concealment stint them. But at last
Those folk departed disillusionéd.
Then, as they left, to that broad-branching tree
We came, which has so many prayers and tears
Rejected. There we heard a voice that said
(Speaking from out the boughs): 'Pass warily,
Nor come too nigh; A tree there is beyond
From which Eve plucked the knowledge of sad years,
And this one from that fatal seed is bred.'

So, hearing this, we three went cautiously
Close to the rise, to pass it; while the voice
Resumed its warnings: 'Think ye of the beasts,
The cloud-bred Centaurs, who, when proudly fed,
'Gainst Theseus fought with twofold breasts. Or they
Who as to drinking made the weaker choice,
That Gideon cast them from his company,
Ere from the mountains upon Midian
He rushed, as when the eagle takes a prey.'

So passed we singly on to edge the way,
Hearing the while the faults of gluttony,
With misery always guerdoned at the end;
And, having passed the tree, again began
To walk abreast. But now most silently
Upon a solitary road we went
A thousand paces and beyond, until
A sudden voice assailed us: 'Wherefore so
Do ye lone three in thoughtful silence go?'
That like a startled beast I swerved, but turned
In the same motion, him who spake to see.

Never so bright was furnace-glass, nor burned
Red-molten metal with so clear a glow
As he who now addressed us: 'If ye will

To mount above,' he said, 'the place is here.
He who pursues his peace will come with me.'

Blinded by that fierce light, I made retreat
Toward my teachers. As, when dawn is near,
The May-wind moves, with scent of grasses sweet,
And by a million flowers impregnated,
So to my forehead came a wind. I heard
The passing plumage that around me shed
Ambrosial fragrance; and a spoken word:
'Blessed are they by too much grace illumed
For greed of appetite more to possess
Their hearts than doth the thirst for righteousness.'

CANTO XXV

It was no hour for crippled limbs to make
The steep ascent, for the meridian
The Sun to Taurus had resigned: the night
To Scorpio. Wherefore, as a man will take
Occasion when his business calls, and haste
To seize his profit, so alike did we
Press upward. Not abreast our climb began,
But singly, as the narrow stair constrained.
And as the young stork lifts its wings for flight,
And dares not leave the nest, and lets them drop,
So did desire to ask arise and stop
Within me while I hastened. As I gained
Control of diffidence, and speech was near,
My kindly Father, whom no haste could bring
To disregard me, spake: 'Put by thy fear.
From speech's bow, already backward drawn,
Loosen the shaft.' And with that comforting,
I asked securely: 'How can spirits be worn
To leaner shadows than they were before,
Having no longer need of nourishment?'

'If,' he replied, 'how Meleager went
The way of death thy mind had weighed, his flesh
Wasting the while the brand consumed, the mesh

Less finely woven of thine argument
Had seemed; or hadst thou thought how wondrously
Thy mirrored image with thyself will move,
The hard enigma had more easily
Thy mind accepted. But thy doubt to prove
Beyond its more endurance, Statius
Is here, and is sufficient. Him I pray
To expound it fully.'

 'If I answer thus,'
Statius replied, 'the eternal verity
Expounding to him, while thou standest by
To hear me, solely my excuse must be
That what thou askest I may not deny.'

Then turning to me: 'If thy mind, my son,
Will open to my words, a light thereby
Will enter, and thy question find reply.

'Within the heart of man a perfect blood
Is found, which doth not reach the thirsty veins,
Though all the virtue in itself contains
Of that which runs the human members through.

'But as from table an uneaten food
May be removed, so is this blood withdrawn,
And after more digestion downward led,
Taking that transit which to leave unsaid
Is seemlier than to say. Another's blood
It now encounters. Its activity,
Born of the heart from where its virtue grew,
Works on the passive stream it meets, wherethrough
It strikes, coagulating. After that
It quickens that which it solidifies,
Making it soil in which its life may grow
A plantlike soul, but with this difference -
The plant is perfect: it has far to go.

Like ocean fungus now, in quickening sense
And limited motion, its development
Is next those organs to design whereby

The air around itself the soul transmutes
Alike to that which did before appear
In fleshly demonstration. As a flame
Follows the originating fire, if that
Be shifted, so this airy semblance moves
As moves the spirit whence itself derives.

'Therefore as moving Shades ourselves we name,
And as we moulded in our earthly lives
Our features by desires of spirit and sense,
So do we still in gradual change. Hereby
We see, we speak, we laugh, we weep, we sigh,
As round the mountain slopes thyself hast heard
And thus is answered all thy wondering word.'

His speech he ceased, and now we came to where
The path no longer climbs, and nearer care
Was ours than such discoursing. Lucent flame
Flashed from the bank, and from the outer edge
A wind uprising held the flame aloft,
Making a possible passage. This to dare
My heart was doubtful. One by one we went
Skirting the void. I heard my Leader say:
'Here must the eyes be straitly reined: astray
A short step taketh.' Much I feared to see
That wind-supported flame's descent. There came
A sound of voices from its heart: '*Summae*',
Sang the hid choir, '*Deus clementiae*',
And hearing this, and seeing through the flame
Spirits who moved within it, will to turn
Was not less eager in me. Variously
Now at my steps I gazed, and now at them,
As caution more or curiosity
Constrained me. In midfire I saw them burn
The while they chanted. At the hymn's decline,
'*Virum*', they cried aloud, '*non cognosco*',
And then repeated, in a voice more low,
The previous anthem. As it ceased, they cried:
'Diana in the wood remained, and drove
Helice from it, who had felt the bane

Of Venus' poison.' Then the chant again
Their voices raised; and then unchastity
Of husbands or of dames their cries denied;
The obligation of the virtuous vow
Asserting. So I think their wont will be
Until the fire release them. With such song
And with such diet shall their years be spent
Till the last wound be closed of sensual wrong.

CANTO XXVI

As thus we traversed that strait path between
The mount's sheer falling and the windheld flame,
My Master's voice in frequent chiding came
To eyes turned sideways as I moved: 'Beware!
Lest profit come not from my frequent care.'
Meanwhile the sun had turned the natural blue
Of all the western skies a whiter hue,
On my right shoulder shining, so that now
The clear flame altered to a darker red,
As my obstructing shadow passed. At this,
More than at us, the Shades in wonder gazed,
Talking among themselves in speech amazed.
'His form is of material earth', they said;
And some approached us, making this pretext
To question whence I was. 'Oh, tell me, thou,'
A Shade began, 'who out of reverence
For those before thee, rather, as I guess,
Than from defect of strength or listlessness,
Dost keep the rearward place, by what defence
Thy substance thwarts the sun, appearing now
As one uncaught by Death's all severing net,
Who yet hast access to this mount. Betray
The truth, not I alone, but all these pray
Who burn with me in this unfailing fire,
And with me thirst; for more is our desire
This thing to learn than comes to mortal man,
Or Indian or Ethiopian,
Desire of water cold and pure.'

So he;

And instant answer had I made; but now
Mine eyes another wonder held. There came
A second column through the midmost flame
Of folk whose faces turned the backward way,
So meeting those with whom I spake. As they
Encountered thus, I saw them, one by one,
Kiss shortly, waiting for no words, and so
Pass onward without pausing. So we see
The ants' brown troops, when each its antennae
Extends to touch another's, thus to learn
It may be to go on, or where to turn,
Or tale of some occurrence fortunate.

As thus they greeted, though they did not stay,
Against each other as they turned away
They cried aloud: 'Sodom and Gomorrah!'
And 'Pasiphae in a cow incarnate lay
That she might draw the bull her lust to sate!'

Thus like two flocks of passing cranes that fly,
One to the Rhipaeon mountains bound, and one
Seeking the sands; either the frost to shun,
Or flying northward from too fierce a sun,
The Shades resumed their opposite ways; and high
Between their weeping chants the earlier cry
Again I heard; and those who came before
Again approached me.

I, their need who knew
Already, answered ere they spake: 'Oh, ye
Secure in having, whensoever it be,
Eternal peace at last, the limbs ye see
Are those of earth I have. I did not leave
My mortal members. Here they move with me,
Bend fleshly joints, and beat with carnal blood.
But here I come, who was on earth too blind,
Graced by a dame of Heaven, my sight to find
With yet my mortal life unfinished.

'But so that, to your most desire, above
The widest heaven ye reach, and most of love,

I charge ye tell me who yourselves ye be,
And who are those behind, who contrary
To your own motions in reverse are led,
That I may write it on my soon return.'

Confused and dumbed by wonder might appear
In city streets uncouth the mountaineer
As did these Shades with wildered looks to learn
My mortal habit. But astonishment
In those of loftier thought is quickly spent.
'Happy art thou,' the one who spoke before
Made answer, 'so to find experience
To guide thee while thine earthly life endure. . .
Those folk who passed us, for that sin's offence
Now suffer which once caused the jibing cry
Of "Queen!" to sound in Caesar's ears, as he
Rode at the height of triumph. Therefore they
Cry "Sodom!" to augment their shame, and be
The urgers of the flame they feel. But we,
Who sinned no less, though less discordantly
To natural use, because like beasts we went
Beyond restraint of human laws, repent
In mentioning her who took a brute's disguise
Her lust to further. Now our sins you know;
But who we are there lacks the time to show,
And of the most myself am ignorant.
But mine own name I will not hide, for I
Am Guido Guinicelli: I the more
Am aided that repentance came before
My death-day neared.'

As in that misery

When for his son Lycurgus mourned, wherethrough
Two other sons with joy their mother knew,
So was I moved (though less mine ecstasy
With less occasion) hearing him declare
Himself the father of the art that I
And others practised, by his precepts led,
Master of many love-songs tender-sweet;
So that for some time after silently
I moved and gazed upon him, while the heat

Refused me a more near approach.

Content

At last with gazing such sure words I said
As win belief, protesting my desire
To serve him. And he answered through the fire:
'Thy words in me revive such memories
As Lethe may not drown, nor make them dim.
Yet, if thine oath be soothly sworn, I pray,
Disclose why thou shouldst love me.'

I to him:

'It is the sweetness of thy songs for they
So long as modern use or language stay,
Shall render their mere ink most precious.'

'Brother,' he answered, 'he I point thee thus'
(His finger lifted to a spirit ahead),
'Was better craftsman in our tongue than I.
In amorous singing ever first of us,
And first alike in prose romance. More high
Let folly rate Limoge's troubadour.
Fools more by chatter than by truth are led,
And fix opinion ere the word be said
That art or reasoned judgment speaks. For so
The ancients did before with Guittone,
Passing the word from voice to voice that he
Alone was prize-deserving. Yet, more slow,
More certain, truth with the majority
Prevailed thereafter. . . If the privilege
Be in that cloister thine again to pray
Where Christ is abbot, wilt thou for me say
One paternoster, in so far as still
We need it here, in whom no more the will
Drives to transgression?'

With these words he went,

It may be to give place to one who neared,
Intending evident speech. He disappeared
In the thick flame as when a visible fish
Dives in the flood. To him his place who took
I spake at once. 'O Spirit,' I said, 'my wish
To know thee hath its thanks prepared.'

To this
With kindred frankness he replied: 'Nor power
Nor inclination to reject thy plea
My heart possesses. I who weep and sing,
Lamenting follies past, but bliss to be
Rejoicing, as to the triumphant hour
I move through this fierce furnace tormenting,
Am Arnaut. By that grace through which you gain
The summit of this mount, recall my pain
In apposite season.'

As the words were said,
His form was hidden in that wall of fire.

CANTO XXVII

Now stretched the rising sun its earliest ray
To reach that city where its Maker died,
While dark beneath the midnight Ebro lay,
And noon's fierce heat blazed on the Ganges' tide.
Therefore with us the twilight failed, as high
Poised on the bank, but from the flame aside,
God's angel we beheld with joy. He sang
Beati mundo corde. Naught could vie,
No human song, with that intensity
Of life which in the chanted accents rang.

Then said he: 'O ye spirits purified,
You may not enter by this stair except
The fire hath licked you. Through its flames ascend,
Heeding the chant beyond.'

As one who died
I heard this doom. With lifted hands I wept
Against the angelic verdict, which to me
Brought visions such as eyes on earth may see
Of human victims to the flames supplied.
Kindly mine escorts turned, and spake my Guide:
'Here may be pain; but death there may not be.
My son, recall! Remind thy heart how well
I led thee through the utter depths of hell.
If safe was your descent on Gerion's back,

Think you that power for your defence I lack,
Being so much nearer God?

'This thing is sure,
That should'st thou for a thousand years endure
The flame's white heart, it could not make thee bare
By one thread shrivelled, or one fallen hair.
But if you hold my words deceitful, try,
Approach, and tempt it with thy garment's hem. . .
Cast out, cast from thee, this ignoble fear!
Secure continue at my side.'

But I
Stood still, although my conscience chid. At this
Virgil, a little troubled in his mien,
Said sharply: 'Thy Beatrice waits above.
Behold the wall that parts you!'

As the name
Of Thisbe to the dying Pyramus came,
And raised his eyelids at the call of love
To gaze upon her, while the mulberry burned
Vermilion overhead, so now to me
The name that ever to my mind recurred
Was potent to control my fear. I turned
Prepared and pliant to my Leader's word,
At which he signed approval. 'Wish we here
To wait?' he smiled upon me, as we smile
Upon the child the apple tempts. He stood
Before me in the fire, and Statius,
Who hitherto had walked between us, now
Followed me. After them I went, but when
I felt that cleansing heat's intensity,
I would have flung myself in boiling glass
To quench the burning. Forward to beguile
My tortured steps, my kindly Guide the while
Talked of Beatrice. 'Past the fire I see
Her waiting eyes.' To lead us straightly through,
We heard a singing voice beyond, and bent
To reach it, issuing at the steep ascent.
Venite, benedicti Patris, so
We heard the chant from out so white a glow
As overcame my sight. With blinded eyes,

I heard the voice give warning: 'Now the sun
Retires, but fail not while the west supplies
Sufficient light to urge thine upward feet.'

The stair was straight between the rocks. It lay
So that its length the sun's retreating ray
Illumined upward to the last, but yet
Few steps were ours before my shadow (none
Was theirs ascending by me) failed, as set
The sun below; and while the west, alive
With failing colour, still was light, before
The canopy of night from sea to sea
Was equalled through its wide immensity
With darkness in all parts distributed,
Each in our place had made a stair a bed;
For, rather than desire to climb outwore,
The power departed with departing day,
And choiceless where we were perforce we lay.

As goats that wantoned on the peaks in play
Before the sun's full heat, when noon is high,
Now being fully fed and ruminant,
Stand silent in the shadows, motionless,
The while the herdsman, leaning on his crook,
As silently regards them; or as lies
The shepherd, roofless to the midnight skies,
Amidst his flock in quiet watchfulness,
Lest ravening beasts should scare and scatter - so we
Lay on the stairs; I as the goat, and those
The shepherds. On each side the sheer rocks rose.
Little they left for sight, but clear and far
A narrow heaven I watched, where star by star
The luminous night's procession passed above.

So ruminating, gradual sleep I knew;
Such sleep as brings its own preconsciousness.
And in that hour when, as I likely guess,
The East upon the Cytherean Mount
First beamed, which with the constant fire of love
Perpetual glows, I dreamed a dame I saw

Youthful and fair. Amid a field of flowers
She pluckt, and wandered singing. This she sang:
'Tell him who asks my name that Leah am I,
With my fair hands a garland wreath I weave,
My mirror and myself to satisfy.
But Rachel at her glass from morn to eve
Sits ever. Fain her own sweet eyes is she
To worship: better with my hands to me
It seems to twist my crown; for diversely
My pleasure is to do, and hers to see.'

But now the lights that actual dawn precede,
And which with pleasure more the pilgrims heed
As nearer to them by ascent they dwell,
Was round us. Fast the sun-slain shadows fled.
So fled my sleep, and in some haste I rose,
Seeing my Masters were alert before.

'That apple, sweet to taste, that men pursue
With so great care so many branches through,
Today will give thy hunger peace.' So said
My Leader. Never gift such ecstasy
Could bring to man as did those words to me.
Passionate desire so urged to such delight
That seemed I felt the lifted wings of flight
Impel swift feet alternate steps to clear.

When the whole stair was passed, and high we stood
With all its length beneath us, fixed regard
My Leader gave me while he spake: 'My son,
Alike the temporal and eternal fires
Now hast thou witnessed. I have led thee here,
To lead no longer; for my sight is barred
To aught beyond us now. With art and wit
I drew thee here, but here my work is done:
Henceforth be guided by thine own desires.
The steep ways and the strait ways lie below:
Here the sun shines, and here the grasses grow.
Here bloom the flowers, and here the shrubs are green
Which fadeless only in this land are seen.

Here mayst thou wander at thy choice, or sit
To wait her coming, whose fair joyful eyes
Wept once, and by their weeping bade me rise
To be thy rescue. Wait my word no more.
Self-conquered, crowned and mitred dost thou stand
As master of thyself. Sound, righteous, free,
Thy judgment only now thy guide should be.'

CANTO XXVIII

I rose, and left the bank. Intent was I
To learn this living land luxuriant,
Forested with such fair trees as tamed the day.
Gently we paced the odorous soil. Too scant
The breeze strength to vex us. Soft it blew
With steady breath and fragrant branches through
Turning the leaves alike the selfsame way
The earliest shadows of the morning lay.

But not so much it turned those leaves aside
That the birds' singing, to its song allied,
Was checked of its full joyance, or delayed
Their glad occasions in the fluctuant shade.
Beneath their chant its constant burden sang,
As through the pines of Chiassi's ancient shore
From branch to branch the long wind evermore
Murmurs; as when, by Aeolus set free,
Sirocco enters.

My slow wandering
Already backward hid the path I made,
When to a stream I came whose course forebade
A further truance. Its soft current ran
To leftward, as the trailing grasses showed
That from the bank in its clear waters swayed.
Earth hath not in its breast so pure a spring
As this, though dusked beneath perpetual shade,
Where never sun nor moon since time began
Reflected ever; nor its purity
Contamination clouds.

Though still my feet,

Mine eyes the breadth of Lethe passed to view
A meadow, where the numerous flowers of May
Made prodigal colour in their fresh delight;
And then as all beside some wondrous sight
Will banish from the mind, alone I knew
A dame who sang along the painted way
Of blossoms which she plucked selectively,
Comparing flower to flower.

'Oh, beauteous One,'

I called her, 'who at Love's life-passioning ray
Hast warmed thee, if thy radiant countenance
Be evidence of the heart, as most will be,
May impulse like to mine arise in thee,
To draw thee to the bank, that I may hear
The wind-borne words of thy continual song.
To Proserpine as I gaze my thoughts belong,
Remembering where she was, and what was she,
When her her mother lost, and she the spring.'

As when a damsel dancing stands erect,
And turns on feet which in their place remain,
Level and close, and as a maid abates
Her honest glance, which lust repudiates,
So did she when she heard my call. Content
She gave me for my prayers. So close she drew
That not alone I caught the singing strain,
But all the meaning of the song I knew.
And when so closely on the bank she stood
That to the trailing grass her foot was set
Which ever by those lucent waves was wet,
Her eyes she lifted, gracious, diffident.

I do not think that Aphrodite's eyes
So beamed when Eros unintendingly
Had roused their charms, as now that glance on me
The while her hands arranged those flowers which rise
Unseeded from the heavenly soil Three strides,
No more, from bliss that narrow stream divides;
But not Leander felt a fiercer hate
For Hellespont, with separating surge

That Sestos from Abydos sundereth,
A bridle human pride still to abate,
Where Xerxes passed of old, than felt I now
Against that stream for its refusing verge.

'I smile,' she said, 'perhaps, because so new
You seem, so strange, so doubtful, marvelling
Of where you be in this fair sanctuary
Designed by Heaven for human kind. Maybe
A light will rise, if *Delectasti me*
Thy mind recall. But if more questioning
Disturb thy reason, ask. The most I may
The part is mine to lift thy doubts away.'

'I marvel,' I replied, 'the wind to hear,
And at the flowing of the water clear,
Where neither wind, I thought, nor rain should be.'

'These things at which you marvel,' answered she,
'Are simple when their cause is known. To me
Give heed, and from thy mind will pass away
The mist which blinds it. When the Ultimate Good,
Which pleasures only in Itself, designed
Creation, It bestowed upon mankind
Goodness both in and for themselves. This wood,
This flowering mead, of their eternal peace
Were earnest. By their own default they fell.
Therefore did kindly mirth and laughter cease;
So learnt they toil too much, and tears too well.
And that, while here they dwelt, they might not feel
Discomfort from the elemental strife
Of winds' and waters' tides, which heat pursue,
This mount was lifted. Here is cool release
Above the barrier. Tumults felt below
Can pass it never. But the loftier air,
In this clear space of any barrier bare,
Still to the moving earth flows contrary
With regular motion, and the close-set wood
To its unvarying pressure sings response.

'This wind, by every plant impregnated,
Their seedless virtue bears, and earth and sky
Unite for their conceptions; various trees
And plants uprising from the seedless ground.
Yet in this holy land all fruits are found
Unpluckt, and of their seeds unravishéd.
And this fair stream no melting snows have fed,
That fluctuate with the cold, or as their source
Of vapour differs. The Eternal Will
Provides a fountain full and sure that still
Sustains its double streams, which backward bring
The unchanging equal of their outward flow.

'By this one, memory of all cancelled sin
Is emptied from the mind: the further stream
Gives recollection of accomplished good
Indelibly fixed for ever. Lethe this,
Eunoe that is styled. Their gain to win,
This must be tasted first: and after, that.
Sovereign of every taste their savour is.
And thus thy doubt is stilled.

'If more I tell,

Beyond thy question, I esteem thee well
That thou wilt value at its worth the word
That so exceeds the measure. Those who told
In ancient legend of an age of gold,
Perchance this Eden, which they had not heard,
They dreamed, and called Parnassus.

'Innocent,

Here was the root whence human life began.
Here is the flowering of perpetual spring;
And all the fruits which earthly autumns bring
Are here to reach. The nectar that they sing
Is only here.'

As, thus interpreted,

High dream and heavenly truth combined, I turned
To those who stood behind. With smiles they learned
The unison that she showed; and I once more
Gave her mine eyes from that dividing shore.

CANTO XXIX

Singing as one love-tranced in ecstasy,
She poured the outburst of her final song:
'*Beati quorum tecta* - '. As of old
Some solitary nymph beneath the shade,
Seeking the light to fly, or else to find,
So held she straight her path the bank along.
Shortening my steps to hers, an equal way
I held abreast. But ere our paces summed
A hundred, hers and mine, the banks inclined
An equal turn, until once more I faced
The sunrise. Short again the course we paced
Before that lady, turning wholly now
Toward me, spake: 'My brother, gaze alert
To that which cometh!' With her word there shone
A light which through the woods from every side
Rushed on us, that at first it caused me think
Of lightning. So doth sudden lightning blink,
And in one instant fail. But this went on,
Dazzling the breadth of heaven from brink to brink,
And brightening ever till my wonder grew
Of what its nature or its cause might be.
And through the luminous air sweet melody
Came with the light.

At this a natural zeal
Stirred my reproach that Eve's audacity,
Even here, where Earth and Heaven obedient bent,
- And she so lately formed their joys to feel! -
Could not endure devout restraint, but rent
The veil of knowledge to our loss. For I
Had else, and for long time, experienced
Delights ineffable that met me now.

While through these firstfruits of eternal bliss
I moved, my mind all hungered and suspended
For further rapture, under the green bough,
Like to a core of unconsuming flame,
The fierce light glowed, and that sweet sound became
Articulate chanting. O ye Virgins Pure!

If ever cold, if ever sleepless hours,
If ever fasting did my frame endure
To do you worship, now occasion drives
That I should plead support of all your powers.
Urania aid me with her choir! And pour
The streams of Helicon freely forth to bring
Conception to a birth of adequate words,
The exaltation of the theme to show.

Dividing distance, that our short advance
Had little altered, served to falsify
The verdict of the eyes. I thought to know
Seven golden masts erect. But as they neared,
Eyes more beheld, and apprehension cleared
The doubt of what they were; and clear I heard
The voices of the single chanted word:
Hosanna!

The fair equipment flamed on high
Far brighter than the moon in midmost sky,
At midnight, in mid-month. I turned to see
My gentle following Guide, and found that he
Was like myself astonished.

Once again
I watched the candles. Not a bride new-wed
Advances slower to the bridal bed
Than they toward us. From the further side
Of Lethe's sundering width, the dame, to chide
Mine eyes' oblivion, spake: 'Why gazest thou
So fixedly on the living lights, that those
Who come behind thou hast no care to see?'

Then saw I folk who moved behind, as though
The high lights led them. Clad in white were they:
Such white as shines not in our earthly day.
For all was brilliance in the lucent air;
River, and woods, and sky, beyond compare
Of worldly vision. On my left the flow
Of the smooth stream returned so clear a glow
That, if I sideward bent, myself I knew,
As in a mirror.

When the candles came
So close that naught but the dividing stream
Between us lay, my steps I stayed to view
The bright procession. Separate every flame
Pencilled the air it passed, that seven long trails
Like the sun's bow or Delia's girdle shone.

I could not see the whole. The flames most nigh
Ten paces parted, as I judge. Behind,
And canopied by the rainbow-painted air,
Came four-and-twenty elders, two by two,
With lilies garland. In unison
They sang: 'Of Adam's daughters blest be thou,
And ever blest thy beauties.'

They went on;
Leaving the opposite flowery herbage clear.
But afterward, as star succeedeth star,
Four living creatures followed. Crowned were they
With garlands of green leaves. Six feathered wings.
Crowded with eyes, they spread. If Argus' eyes
Were living, such were they. But words too far
I will not waste these wondrous beasts to say.
Too freighted am I with rich furnishings
To spend with lavish rhymes on that which lies
Clear in Ezekiel's pages. Read ye how
From the cold north, in whirlwind, cloud and fire,
They came, and tempest in their wings that vies
With noise of mightiest waters. Like as he
I saw them, only that the wings were six,
As John bears witness also.

In the space
That these four creatures cornered, came a car
Two-wheeled, triumphal. Harnessed by the neck,
A Grifon drew it. Raised too high to see,
His wings went through the coloured bands of light,
But did not break them. Three, and equal three,
Were outward, and within, the central bar.
His birdlike limbs were golden: dazzling white
Was all besides, or else vermilion.
Not merely Rome's Augustus car so fair,

Not Africanus such rejoiced, but bare
Of splendour that which owned Hyperion -
The car that blundered in its course, and burnt,
When prayed for life the suppliant Earth, and learnt
That Jove was in his secret counsels just -
Had shown to this.

 Upon the right wheel's side
Three damsels came in whirling dance. The first
So redly glowed that in a heart of fire
She might have found invisibility:
The second shone with such intensity
That seemed throughout her very bones and flesh
Were emerald: and the third was purest snow
New-drifted. On the car's left side appeared
Four others, purple-draped. Three eyes had she,
The first, who led them through the dance's mesh.

Following there came two elders reverend,
Differently apparelled, but of like regard,
Sober and grave of mien. The one was he,
Familiar of the great Hippocrates
By Nature for her dearest creatures made.
The other held a bright and naked blade,
Of opposite purpose from the healer's art.
So keen it shone that not so far apart
I stood, despite the separating stream,
But fear was mine to view it.

 After these
Came four of humbler guise; and last, and lone,
An old man blinded by his inward dream,
But yet with eyes undimmed.

 The seven wore
Like garb to those of the preceding band,
But not with lilies whitely garlanded.
Wreathed were they with such roses fiery-red,
And other flowers of scarlet flame, that they,
To sight of those a little space away,
Seemed crowned with glorious fire.

 As opposite
To where I stood the car had drawn, there came

A burst of thunder. At the signal sound,
The whole procession with its masts of light
Halted, as though the place it sought were found,
Or else forbidden from the forward ground.

CANTO XXX

When halted was the wain of Heaven, which knows
No other veil than sin's obscuring cloud,
Which never on horizon set nor rose
Like that which wheels around our earthly sky,
Yet to all reverend eyes their duty shows,
As doth our own the helmsman certify
Of where unseen the distant port will lie,
Then did those folk sincere, whose steps had been
Before it and behind, around it draw,
As to their natural peace, and one aloud
Singing as though by Heaven deputed, cried:
'Come, Spouse, to Lebanon', and all beside
Joined in the cry.

As, at the final hour,
From every sepulchre the separate dead
Shall rise, and with recovered voices cry
A Hallelujah in one chant, so now
Salvation's prophets and evangelists,
A hundred voices, by that elder led.

They all were saying *Benedictus qui*
Venis, and flowers were scattering. *Manibus*
O date lilia plenis. I have seen
About the coming of dawn, the eastern sky
Rosed, and the rest of heaven all clearly fair,
While the sun's disc behind the misty air
Was tempered of its glory, so that I
Sustained to face it for a long time. And so,
Behind the cloud of flowers their hands did throw,
A dame appeared, with olive crowned, above
A veil of white. A mantle green she wore,
And under that a gown of ruddiest flame.
At which veiled form such flooding memories came,

Such recollections of that ancient love,
By hidden virtue stirred, which reached me through
The eyes' default, that my crushed spirit, so long
Sundered from her dear presence, now trembling knew
Its previous power.

As that high virtue smote
Mine eyes, as yet unseeing, which pierced me first
In boyhood's days, I leftward turned, to where
My Guide had been, as to his mother will run
An infant in its fear, or grief to tell.
I would have said: 'My pulses all resign
Their constant use. I feel the ancient spell
Of that dear presence', but alone we stood,
Statius and I. For that loved Guide of mine,
Virgil, my sweetest Father, at whose sign
My feet had followed through the depths of Hell
In search of my salvation, he was gone.

Not all that region's high serenities,
By Eve so poorly bartered, not the dew,
Holier than tears, by which my cheeks had been
So lately cleansed, could now prevail; as do
Our mortal race, I wept.

'Dante, although
From out thy sight for ever doth Virgil go,
Thou shouldst not weep therefor. Let prudence keep
Thy tears against a heavier cause, to weep
A deeper wound.'

Again I turned, the way
The voice constrained me. As an admiral
Looks outward from his deck on poop or prow,
Observing and directing where and how
The vessels round him and the crews array,
And urging emulous deeds, so stood there now
Upon the left rim of the sacred car
- As I faced round upon my own name's call,
Which I have written of necessity -
That dame whom I at my last glance had seen
In the car's midst, half hid beneath the showers
Flung from the angelic hands of falling flowers,

Gazing upon me, with the stream between.

Although the veil which from Minerva's wreath
Fell round her head denied the face beneath,
Haughtily she continued, as he may
Who yet withholds his strongest word to say:
'Regard me well. I am Beatrice. Yes!
I am Beatrice. What contemptuousness
Led thee to view this mount? Didst thou not know
That men are happy here?'

 Mine eyes so low
Sank down before her that myself I saw
In the clear stream, and that so nakedly
That to the grass I dropped them further, shame
Being so hard a weight upon my brow.

Thus the rebuking mother to the son,
Savouring with bitterness her pity stern,
May haply seem. But I made answer none,
And she returned to silence, while around
The angelic concourse suddenly sang: '*In te,
Domine, speravi*', letting fall the sound
At pedes meos. As in Italy,
When on its backbone the Dalmatian gale
Drives through the living rafters, snow congeals,
Which afterwards will melt and filter though,
As candles feel the fire, even so to me
That chanting, from the lips of those who quire
In the high circles, froze my tears entire,
Until I heard in their sweet harmony
A sympathy more plain than had they said:
'Lady, why dost thou so chastise?' Whereat
The hard frost melted round my heart, and fell
In anguished weeping.

 She, unmoving still
Upon the bulwark of the car, replied,
Not to myself, but them: 'Your watch you keep
In everlasting day, nor night nor sleep
Severing one scene of earthly life, and so,
My care in answering is more great than he

Diviner things, without one pause to wail
Repentance for his soul's unchastity.'

CANTO XXXI

Then turned she - if the edge too sharp had been
Of her sharp censure, judge the point how keen! -
Her words direct upon me. 'Answer, you.
Answer! And if the charge be straitly true
Own or deny. Such accusation needs
Confession from thy lips attached thereto.'

But I in such confusion stood that naught
Articulate issued from my lips, the thought
Failing to move the organs to reply.
This silence she endured awhile, and then
Again adjured me: 'Answer; for as yet
The waters have not caused thee to forget
The unholy memories.'

Then confusedly,
As forced of fear, my lips so bare a Yes
Contrived that rather than the ears could guess
The eyes must see it. As a crossbow breaks,
Being too hardly stretched, both cord and bow
Snapping, that with less force the bolt will go
To find its mark, so with that burden I
Broke down, and speechless, only tear and sigh
Had spirit to utter. Wherefore she to me:
'To ultimate virtue - and what goal may be,
What aspiration rise, more high than that? -
What chains across thy path, what pits were spread,
To turn thee, hopeless to advance more high?
What relaxation or what furthering
Was in those other faces, that with them
You were constrained to wanton indolent?'

I answered first with but a breaking sigh,
And then my lips with labour framed reply:
'After the present things I weakly went,
Finding false pleasures when your face withdrew.'

She answered: 'Had you argued or denied,
Or countered me with silence, not the less
Thy fault had been, but when the lips confess
The judgment may be gentlier satisfied.
And now, that shame be more endurable,
And that the siren voices, heard anew,
May be rejected, lay the seed aside
Of thine appropriate sorrow. Hear and heed.
Learn how my buried body might have moved
Thy heart to nobler motions.

'Never yet

Did art or living beauty round thee set
A lure more lovely than you found to be
Mine own fair members, now in earth's decay
Degraded, crumbled. If thy heart approved
Past all competing toys my loveliness,
And through my death high pleasures passed away,
What mortal thing of meaner worth should then
Have drawn thee downward? Bartering for the less
The best thou hadst already. Surely when
The arrows of such falsehood round thee fell,
Thou shouldst have raised thy soul to mine, which stood
Secure above the tumult, soaring where
Thy wings sufficed. No girl's light eyes, no nude
Exposure of inferior pulchritude,
Transient and vain, had held thee. Fledglings weak
May wait the arrows, but the eagle grown
Sees the spread snare, avoids, and soars alone.'

As beardless boys rebuked with shame may stand,
Penitent and silent stood I. Seeing this,
She spake again: 'If hearing breed thy woe,
Then raise thy beard, a greater grief to know,
Which sight shall bring thee.'

Never stubbornest oak

With more resistance to the tempest-stroke
Of Iarbas, or our own north-western gale,
Uprooted rose, than my reluctant head
I raised at her commanding. Well I read

That word, the poison of her argument,
That I no boyhood's sins must there repent,
But that my bearded years had seen me fail.

Hardly mine eyes I raised. Again I saw
Those primal beings. They had ceased to strew
The heavenly flowers, and rested round the car.
Further I looked, and still uncertainly,
And there Beatrice, turned aside, could see
Beside the Grifon, whose one entity
Includes two natures. Though beyond the stream
And veiled so closely, did her beauty seem
Less than anticipation told? Not so;
But more than she surpassed all else below
When mortal, now she passed her mortal part.
So felt I then the prick of penitence
That those delights which once had turned me thence
Now became hateful to the same degree
That they before had power to snare my heart;
And recollection gave such wounds that she,
She only who had caused those wounds in me,
Could answer of what next I failed or did.

But when my natural functions waked anew
The stream was round me to the neck. I knew
The face above me of the dame who first
Had met me in this land. Her arms forbid
My sinking, and her voice was in mine ear:
'Hold - hold.' Herself moved shuttle-light, immersed
Not wholly. And I heard, so sweet, so clear,
That not my words alone but memories fail
To equal its recall: *Asperges me*
They sang. But when the blessed bank was near
The fair dame laid her arms about my head,
And plunged it under, that my thirst should be
With that cold draught contented. Then she led
My glad feet upward, and presented me,
So cleansed, to those fair damsels, purple-clad,
Who each embraced me with an arm in turn,
The while they danced around me. 'Here,' they said,

'We are but nymphs, for us Beatrice had
For handmaids ere to middle earth she went.
Nymphs are we here, but in the heavens we burn
Eternal stars. We to her eyes will lead
Thy willing feet, but by the further three,
Who search more deeply through the soul than we,
Will be their joyous light interpreted,
To make thine own eyes keener.'

So they sang,

The while they led me to the Grifon's breast,
Where still Beatrice stood. 'See now,' they said,
'That thine eyes spare not to behold. For thee,
Love once her weapons from the emerald three
Obtained for thy salvation.'

Hot desires,

A thousand, fiercer than material fires,
Burned in me, as my stedfast gaze I set
Upon the shining of her eyes, which yet
Did not regard me. On the Grifon she
Gazed only, and its image I could see
Within her eyes reflected. Wondrously
I saw it, as the sun's high splendour shows
Reflected in a mirror. Wondrously
Its twofold nature would itself disclose
In diverse aspects, while itself remained
Single and quiet. Judge how marvellous
That sight and those reflections looked to me.

While joyful I, and thus astounded, stood
My soul consuming the celestial food
Which makes more thirst the more it satisfies,
The emerald three came round me, in their eyes
And in their mien their high nobility,
Dancing to the angelic choir.

'Return!'

They sang, 'Beatrice, oh return! to him,
Thy faithful one, thy holy eyes, so far
His feet have journeyed of thy face to learn.
Why doth thy veil thy mouth's sweet beauty bar?
Deign of thy grace this grace to us to deal.

Why should he longer seek, and thou conceal?'

O splendour of that live and lasting light!
Who is there who so vigil-pale hath grown
Beneath Parnassus' shadow, or so long
Has drunk its cistern, the uncumbered song
Could equal to describe that heavenly sight,
When thy discovered face, serene, alone,
God overbowed with all His harmonies?

CANTO XXXII

So fixed became mine eyes, so diligent
Their ten years' thirst to quench, that wholly spent
My senses were to sight reduced. They knew
Nothing to right nor left. The old net drew
Once more its ancient prey. The sainted smile
Lacked not its previous power. But they the while,
Those emerald-shining nymphs, at my left side,
Constrained me heed. 'Too fixed thy gaze', they cried.
Whereat I turned about my blinded eyes
Which, being as those which gaze upon the sun,
From meaner sights by that high light fordone,
I could not for a time in any wise
Behold the lesser objects (as they were,
Though loftiest, to that sight beyond compare
Of sensuous excellence), and now I saw
The glorious army change its forwardness,
As doth a regiment on the front of war,
Wheeling on its right flank, and turning so
That the sun faced, and the seven flames did go
Before it, as at first.

As troops regress,
Wheeling beneath their standard, closing still
Their left-arm shields to face the hostile field
Before they turn completely, likewise wheeled
These soldiers of the Heavenly Kingdom: thus
Filed past the car before it turned. Once more
The dancers at the wheels resumed. Once more
The Grifon drew the blessed weight, but so

That not a feather stirred its tail to show.

That dame who bore me through the stream, and I,
With Statius, at the car's right rear, pursued
The wheel that tracked the smaller arc. We went
Through the high wood, reduced to solitude
By her who trusted to a serpent's tale,
Our footsteps timing to an angels' strain,
Perhaps three bowshots' space, when once again
We halted, and Beatrice from the car
Again descended. 'Adam' was the word
That voices round me murmured. Here a tree
We circled, bare of foliage or of flower.
So huge it rose, and shadowing overhead
With at the greater height the huger spread,
That Indians, of their mighty woods aware,
Might marvel at those branches, gaunt and bare.

'Blessed art thou' - so cried the voices round -
'Blessed art thou, O Grifon, that thy beak
Rends not the rind of this accursed tree.
For sweet although the tasted wood may be,
Bitter its tortures in the belly's bound.'

'So is preserved all seed of righteousness',
The twofold-natured Creature made reply,
Drawing the car's pole close against the tree,
And binding it thereto.

As when the sun
Looks down from Aries, earthly plants will swell
Their turgid stems, and ere its shining car
Reach the dominion of a further star
Will flower in their own colours variously,
So, at the contact of the pole, did now
That tree's stark form; and every leafless bough
Blossomed, more red than roses are, and yet
Less darkly purple than the violet,
Beyond my power to speak. Nor can I tell
The heavenly tune I heard, or did not hear.
For while it sounded in my tranced ear

Sleep came. Could I interpret in what wise
Sleep closed, at Syrinx' tale the ruthless eyes
- The eyes which too much heeding cost so dear -
Then as a painter would I represent,
Who limns his model, how through sleep I went,
And how awakened. But I say no more
Than this: sleep came. And then a brightness tore
Its veil apart. A call I heard: 'Arise!
What dost thou thus?'

As Peter, James and John
When led the heavenly apple-bloom to see
Which forms such fruit upon the sacred tree
That even the angels take it greedfully
(Because the tasting of this fruit doth give
The constant wedlock in which angels live)
Returned from that far wandering when the word
Which once had broken deeper sleep they heard
And found Elias from their Masters gone,
And Moses, and His earthly raiment shone
No longer, so to me my sense returned
To find that kind conductress, who before
Had taught my ignorant steps on Lethe's shore,
Bending above me. All in doubt I cried:
'Where is Beatrice?'

'Here she resteth. See!
Beneath the tree's new green, upon its root
She sits, amidst her own high company.
The others, with the Grifon, from the ground
Have risen with sweeter song and more profound
Than reached to charm thy mortal ears before.'

I know not if she ceased, or told me more,
For in my captive sight again was she
Who all beside excluded. There she sat
Central, alone upon the sacred ground,
Close to the holy car which there-beside
The Creature of the twofold nature tied,
The while the seven nymphs were circled round,
Making themselves her cincture. In their hands
Were now the stars which gave their virtues name

From Auster to Aquilo.

'Thou shalt be

For some time now a woodman to this tree,
And then together everlastingly
Thou shalt dwell with me in that Rome whereof
Christ is Himself a Roman; wherefore fill
Thy mind with all thou seest. Regard the car.
The profit of the world which liveth ill
So canst thou serve. Revealed for thee to write
On thy return to earth these wonders are.'

So spake Beatrice. I, whose utmost will
Was at the feet of her commands to sit,
Turned eyes and ears the way she would.

Less swift,

When thunder in the storm's black heart is born,
Descends it shining through the rain than now,
Ignited from the clouds' high boundary,
The bird of Zeus swooped down upon the tree,
So fiercely that its very bark was torn.
Much more the flowers and foliage fell forlorn
From these all-rending talons. Strong wings smote
The holy car, and as, with reeling prow,
A vessel takes the tempest, now to port,
And now to starboard by its fury flung,
So rocked it.

Next I watched a vixen crawl
- A lean starved vixen - to the chariot's well,
Whereat my lady with such scourging speech
Assailed her for her foul iniquities
That with the speed her fleshless legs could reach
She fled therefrom. Then, from its previous height,
The eagle came again. This time its fall
Was to the body of the car, and all
The floor thereof with feathers loose was strewn.

Then, as a heart from bitter feeling cries,
A voice of Heaven I heard: 'O ship of mine!
What evil cargo weights thy hold!'

Between

The car's two wheels I saw a scorpion rise,
Which the ground gaped to render. Through the floor
His upturned tail malign I watched him bore,
And then, as though a wasp its sting withdrew,
He wrenched it back, a fragment of the floor
Adhering to it, with which pilfered prize
He wandered round about.

Thus mutilate,
The car, as swiftly as we breathe a sigh,
Covered itself, to wheels and pole, anew,
As though on fertile land fresh herbage grew,
With those descended feathers, haply shed
From pure benignant purpose overhead.

So fledged, the sacred chariot wondrously
Seven heads projected, three along the pole,
Four at the corners. Hornéd like a bull
The foremost showed. The four a single horn
Alike displayed. Was no such prodigy
In our time known. Now came a different sight.
Secure as fortress on a mountain height,
In the car's midst, with raiment loosed and torn,
And ever-turning brows, a harlot sat;
While at her side a giant rose upright
As though to keep her for himself. Awhile
Thereafter they embraced in harlot's wise;
But then she cast on me her roving eyes,
Which her fierce paramour perceived. Thereat
He whipped her in his wrath from heels to head,
And in his lustful rage and jealousy
He loosed the monster from the sacred tree
- The monster that had been the holy car -
And drew it from me through the woods so far
That I no more might beast or harlot see.

CANTO XXXIII

Alternate, now the three and now the four,
The virgins, weeping, made sweet psalmody
Around Beatrice. *Deus*, was the song,

Venerunt gentes. Sighing, pitiful,
She heard them in such sort that little more
Was Mary's at the Cross of woeful guise.

But after, as they ceased, she rose upright,
And glowing now with love like fire was she.
'*Modicum et non videbitis me,*
Et iterum, my sisters dear,' she said,
'*Modicum et vos videbitis me.*'

Then with a hand's slight motion silently
She placed the seven before her, and behind
Myself and Statius, and the dame who led
My footsteps to her. Thus she moved away;
But not ten steps had taken when she turned
Her eyes full on me. 'Come more close,' she said,
'The better to perceive the things I say.'
Then, as obedience and desire inclined,
I shortened distance.

As I gained her side,
'Brother,' she said, 'now that you come with me,
Why have thy lips grown silent? Canst thou find
No question in thy mind?'

I answered her
As one through reverence grown too diffident
For speech clearly to pass the lips: 'You know,
Madonna, what for me is meet and good,
Perceiving all I need, and all I would.'

To which she answered: 'Then receive my will.
Reject the shame and fear which thrall thee still.
Speak not as one from dreams not wholly free.
Thou knowest the chariot which the scorpion tore
Was once God's vessel, but endures no more;
But let him well believe whose guilt is this:
God's vengeance will not spare that deed amiss
For eaten sops above the victim's grave.
The eagle who with plumage strewed the car,
Making it monstrous first, and then to prey,
Will not be heirless always. This I say,

Who see its certain coming. Stars too high
For human hindrance or assault decree
That very near from now the time shall see
Five hundred, ten, and five, God's ministry,
The two who sinned, both giant and harlot, slay.

'It may be that my words persuade thee less
That they express, like Themis and the Sphinx,
Their meaning darkly; but the time is near
When facts will be the Naiades who cleave
The hard rind of the riddle, losing naught
Either of flocks or corn. These words believe;
And as you hear them from my lips, receive
And bear them to the ears of those who live
The life which journeys deathward. Do not fail
To write on earth thy record of the tree
Which thou hast seen twice plundered. He who strips
That tree of leaf or fruit acts blasphemy
Against High God who for His only use
Had formed it holy. He whose impious lips
First tasted, through five thousand years of pain
Longed for Him, who, man's first bliss to regain,
Became his Saviour. Wisdom finds eclipse
Within thee, if, without more words from me,
The reason for its height thou canst not see,
Nor why its topmost branches spread so wide.
And had thy thoughts of earthly vanity
Had less of hardening power than Elsa's stream
To petrify thy mind - or had not been
Thy worldly pleasures to thine intellect
As Pyramus' blood that soiled the mulberry tree -
Thou hadst not needed such high circumstance
To render clear to thy morality
God's justice when he first forbade the tree.

But as I see thine understanding through,
Hard as is stone, and all of stony hue,
So that my words against it sideward glance,
And thou art dazzled and confused thereby,
I will a further explanation try,

That on thy mind the picture may remain
Though the words fail thee; giving thee such gain
As that for which the palm-crowned staff may be
By pilgrims taken.'

'As soft wax the seal
Presses,' I answered, 'and indelibly
The figure moulds upon it, so my brain
Receives the impress of thy words. But why
Does thy kind speech, which I had yearned to hear,
So high beyond my sight's perception soar
That still the more I strive I lose the more?'

'So shalt thou understand,' she said, 'the school
Which thou hast followed, and how far its rule
Is able to approach my speech, and see
That your way walked from God's way distantly
As earth from Heaven is far.'

And I to her:

'I cannot in my conscience now recall
One thought's estrangement from thee once in all
My earthly life apart, nor memories stir
To prick reproach.'

'If recollection keeps
So blank a tale, you may bethink you how
You drank from Lethe's drowning wave but now;
And as from smoke a fire we postulate,
You may perceive that where your memory sleeps
Was either faith's default or active wrong.
But truly from this time my words shall be
Made clear for your unpractised sight to see.'

The sun its high meridian circle held
(Which variously from different points appears)
With slowest shadows, and with light most strong,
When the seven virgins came to pause, as may
The scout who goes before a troop, if he
Some doubtful sign perceive across the way.

In a pale shade they stood - such twilight shade
As may by black boughs and green leaves be made

Above the Alps' cool brooks. Beyond I saw,
As though Euphrates from one spring arose
With Tigris, separate course reluctantly,
Like slowly-parting friends, thence to pursue;
Two streams that left one fount. 'O Light,' I said,
'O Glory of our human kind, disclose,
I pray thee, what this wondrous stream I view,
Which not to join its force, but parting flows.'

And answer to this prayer there came to me:
'Entreat Matilda that she tell.' Whereat
The fair one who had guided me so well,
As one who self-defends from blame: 'To tell
This thing I failed not; nor in verity
Could Lethe drown it.'

Then Beatrice said:

'Perchance a moment of exceeding bliss
Blinded the vision of his mind to this
He earlier heard. But here Eunoe's source
He sees. There lead him. In thy wonted way
Revive again his virtue partly dead.'

As one who knows the full nobility
Of service which declines excuse, but makes
Another's will its own, all to obey
When the first sign is given, Matilda turned
As instant as my lady's will she learned,
And ordered Statius, as a lady may:
'Come with him.'

Had my pen a longer course,
Something I might relate, though failing all,
Of that sweet draught which mine insatiate lips
Could not have tired of tasting. But too small
The sheets which by mine art are limited
Would prove to bear them. Filled at last they lie.

I have no space to tell, beyond that I
Drank that most holy wave, as plants new-fed
With the pure rain, to break in foliage new;

And rose up cleansed, and equal to pursue
Ascension to the stars.

The End

The Paradiso
From the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri

Translated by S. Fowler Wright

The Paradiso

Note: There are two typed M.S. labeled 'A' & 'B' for identification. This file was typed and scanned from version 'A' and then checked against, and altered to be version 'B'. The differences are minor - and to the non scholar - apparently academic.

Some Cantos were published in 'Poetry' & 'Poetry & The Play'. It was never published in book form. Perhaps because it did not universally reach the same standard as the other two translations. It is to be noted that the language and artistry of the original poem would in any case render it the most difficult to translate realistically.

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Canto I.

The Glory which is God, which all creates,
And all with motion quickens, penetrates
The immensities of space unequally,
In certain regions more resplendently
And less in others.

I who write have been
In the mid-heaven of utmost light: have seen
Things which nor memory holds nor speech could tell,
Too far transcending our mortality
For human intellect to bear away.

Yet what I rescued from that holy well,
Truth paled by human words, or beauty marred
By mortal vision, must I try to say.

O Great Apollo! Grant the strenuous wing
This ultimate labour needs. This height to sing,
So fit me with thy fashioning hands that I
Win thy loved laurels with a task so hard.

One pinnacle of Parnassus - one till now -
Sufficed me, but the holier heights supply
My needs for this last wrestling-ground. Do thou
Enter and through me breathe such song as that
The wretched Marsyas heard, and quailed till he

Was flayed for his presumption. O Divine!
Wilt thou but implicate thyself in me,
That Heaven's high shadow, on this brain of mine
Imprinted, be in words interpreted!
Then shalt thou crown me at thy chosen tree
With laurels only through this theme and thee
Appropriate to my worth.

So seldom shed
Are its fresh leaves to crown triumphant brow
Either of poet or of conqueror
- Such the infirmities of human will
That surely should the Delphic deity
Rejoice when any mortal mind, as now,
Is stirred by the Peneian branch to be
Athirst to wear it.

Flames magnificent
May follow from one spark's first feebleness;
And better voices may their prayers address
At Cirrha's sacred mount, to gain for me
Response, who am not worthy.

Diversely
Riseth the lantern of the universe
To mortal sight, but most propitiously,
And unioned to a most propitious star,
When the four circles in three crosses meet;

And at that time he will with genial heat
Upon the mundane wax himself impress
Most deeply, tempering to his mood.

So here
It was, and at the hour when morning lay
To right, and to the left the evening,
At equal distance, all the hemisphere
Aglow, and all that other dark, when she,
Beatrice, leftward turned, and raised her eyes
Sunward. No eagle could the light absorb

That smote us radiant from the noonday orb
As did she then; and as from light is born
A light reflected, so, in kindred wise,
I caught her gesture, and my weaker eyes
Lifted, beyond our mortal wont, to see
Deep into that pure light's profundity.

Much is there in that higher, holier place
Which is not granted to our mortal race,
Each region having its propriety.
I could not long endure such light, but yet
Such time mine eyes the blinding glory met
That when they fell the sun was around
Shining like molten metal on the ground
Poured from the furnace.

Day me seemed to day
Was suddenly added, light to light, as though
God's power had caused a second sun to glow,
Doubling the day's intensity. Mine eyes,
Baffled by this extremity of light,
Turned to Beatrice, whose own gaze remained
Fixed upward on the sky's profundity.
So gazing on her, such new life I gained
As came to Glaucus, when that grass he ate
Which gave the alien freedom of the sea,
And made him comrade of the gods. To me
Came change of life which no humanity
Can either clothe in words, or comprehend.
Let him whom grace will dower so highly wait
Experience for himself.

If in that hour
I was no more than that which, new-create,
Invades the body at birth, O Love Divine!
Who in that heaven of light art Absolute Power,
Thou knowest, Who, by that same light didst draw
Myself toward Thee. But whate' er was more
Of soul or physical body, when the wheel
Which thou (by kindling for Thyself desire)

Makest perpetual, caught me up to feel
Its tempered and discriminate harmony,
Such ocean of the intense gold sunlight saw
That rain nor river spread a lake as wide
As now I witnessed of celestial fire.

The sound unheard before, the light unguessed,
Stirred in me for their cause more keen a zest
Than aught I felt in earthlier days; and she
Who saw me rather as herself in me
Than separate, to the unspoken thought replied:

"Thou foilest by thy false imagining
That which were clear to an inferior mind
If it were first from misconception free.
Thou art not on the earth. The lightnings flee
Downward from their high house more laggardly
Than though dost rise a higher place to find."

So briefly to my doubt she smiled reply.
But grounded firmly as my feet she set,
Her answer caught them in a further net.

"From one amazement freed, I marvel now
How my dense weight of flesh can rise so high
Transcending lighter air."

I heard her sigh
As might a mother at a child perverse
Beyond restraint of counsel. Patient yet,
She gave me answer: "Of one unity
Is all created in this Universe,
Mutual in all its parts, its form thereby
Alike to God who made it. Creatures blest
By high perception in this norm descry
The Eternal Virtue, source and goal alike
Of all its parts, although not equally
They seek a centre or at height to rest,
But each toward that port which suits it best
Moves through the ocean of reality.

"This urge toward the moon the flame extends,
Is surgent at the heart of things that die,
Doth earthward gravitate all earthly ends,
Nor only rules the unconscious entity,
But those who think and love.

"This providence,
Assorting all, doth outward still remain,
Serene and spaceless by its light's defence,
The swiftest Heaven containing. That to gain
- The ultimate Heaven of flooded light - we go,
Upshot as by a shaft from God's own bow,
That doth not fail its joyful mark to find.

"Truth is it that the artist's moulding stress
May meet a medium which resists his mind,
Too hard of substance or too lustreless
To be to his creative thought inclined.
And so may creatures of a conscious will
Resist the heavenly call, and swerve aside,
The ardent impulse of ascent to kill
(As fire thrusts downward from the cloud) with vain
Following of false joys,

"No cause to marvel thine
More at thy rising, than at flame's ascent,
Or at the natural falling of the rain.
It were the wonder should thy course incline
Not upward, from released impediment."

She ceased, who saw me with a mind content;
And turned her eyes to highest heaven again.

Canto II.

Oh ye who in slight skiffs, by music led,
Have to this point among our human dead
Followed my keel upon its singing way,

Take caution now! Your shores are still to see.
Why should you venture on too strange a sea,
Uncharted, untraversed, when, losing me,
You might be left for evermore astray?

Minerva's winds I feel: my course ahead
Apollo guideth: and the Muses nine
Point to the Bears. Ye few who, timely fed
On angels' food (which here must life sustain,
And yet who feedeth leave unsatisfied),
Ye only few may dare this course of mine,
Following the furrow which my tracks divide
Before its hollow sides unite again.
The glorious ones who once to Colchis came,
When Jason turned to ploughman in their sight,
Beheld a thing less marvelled than shall ye.

The natural deathless thirst in heaven to be
- The aspiration all from birth may claim -
Impelled us upward with the speed of light
Wellnigh as fast to rise as eyes could see
Into the luminous vault's immensity,
The while I on Beatrice gazed, and she
Gazed upward.

In such time as from the bow
A back-drawn shaft upon its course may go,
I came where I beheld a wondrous thing.
And she, who did not miss my wondering,
Turning toward me in such guise that joy
Increased her beauty, and her beauty gave
An added joyance, said: "Thy mind employ
In gratitude to Him by Whom so far
Thou art exalted to the lowliest star."

It seemed a cloud enclosed us, shining, dense,
With polished surface firm that, diamond-bright,
Was dazzling in the sun's reflected light.
We passed within the eternal pearl, as sinks
A ray of sunlight in the stream, which drinks

The light, land is not opened: cleft and whole.
If I were body or unsubstanced soul
I know not. What in wisdom can we guess
Who see one body, not itself the less,
Another in its own dimension take,
Beyond our comprehending? This the more
Should kindle longing to ourselves explore
That essence where, at last the Accepted Bride,
Our nature to High God is unified.

That which we hold by faith we do not state
In logic's terms. We do not demonstrate,
But like the primal truth to man self-known
Accept it, confident in belief. I said:
"Madonna, thanks devout to God I own
Who here hath raised me from the world of sin.
But wilt thou show me what those marks may be
Which on this moon's bright surface duskily
When men look upward from the earth they see,
And tell the tale of Cain?"

Then mirthfully,
She smiled upon me. "Now," she said, "no more
The shafts of wonder should thy mind transfix
That mortal wisdom fails without the key
Of sense by which to enter. Here you see
That even where the senses lead, the wings
Of reason are too short. But tell me first
Thine own interpretation."

I to her:
"I judge that bodies more or less dispersed
In this high region, by their density,
Or else deffuseness, differing aspects bear
To those on earth who view them."

"Verily,"
She answered, "wilt thou hearken now to me,
Thy thought, confronted by mine argument,
Shall own its falsehood.

"The eighth sphere displays
A multitude of glories, variously
Perceived, not only through their quantities,
But by their qualities also. If their rays
Were different only as their density
Should vary, then one virtue, more or less,
Were in them only. Diverse virtues spring
From diverse principles. Of all of these
There were one only by thy reasoning.

"And think again, if differing densities
Cause the bright surface or the dusker blur,
Either the tenuous patch continues through
The moon's whole substance, or alternately,
Like fat and lean the different strata lie.

"Were the first true, the sun's eclipse would show
With penetrating light, which is not so,
And therefore, if the next I overthrow,
Thy theory wholly is reject. If through
The moon's opaqueness naught of sunlight drives
From the far side, then reason bids infer
That somewhere, through its whole circumference,
There is a limit to the rarity
For which you argue; and, if this be so,
From such dark stratum must the light recoil,
As colour backward from a glass is thrown
By lead behind it. Yet you will not lack
The final argument that further back
May be the density by which the patch
Shows darker; but from this abortive plea
Experiment will disentangle thee,
If that thou pleasest, as thine arts are known
To advocate, for from experiments spring
The streams of knowledge ever broadening.

"Three mirrors shalt thou take, exposing two
At equal distance, and the third, between,
Ranged further from thine eyes. Behind thy back

Kindle a torch from which they shall return
Reflected light toward thee. Smaller seen
Will be the further, but as bright to view
As those more near on either hand.

"And now

-Thine own false reasons both dissolved, as snow
Melts in the sunlight to the equal lack
Of colour and coldness - I would more inform
Thy bankrupt intellect with light so warm,
So living, it shall vibrate in thy sight.

"Within the heavens of holy peace revolves
A body from whose virtue is derived
The being of all which they contain. The height
Of the near heaven above, which hath to show
So many constellations, diverse-bright,
Hath diverse essences distributed
Among them, which themselves by various glow
Distinguish in their own diversity.
So also through the graded heavens rotate
A Myriad circling bodies of diverse state,
By various powers divine impregnated,
With downward influence from above them fed.

"Now mark intently how the truth I thread
To that thou seekest, that the ford alone
Thy feet may take hereafter. Impulsed thus
They wheel, and on mankind they operate -
As doth the hammer that the smith controls,
His art, and not its own, to justify.
The shining constellations, marvellous
From the deep Mind from which their circle rolls,
Marked by its seal upon them, must impress
The image that themselves accept no less
Upon the earth beneath. And as men's souls
Emerge from out their animated dust
Through different members diversely designed
For various operations, so the Mind
Divine, the myriad diverse stars behind,

Deploys its virtue, each diversion free
Within its comprehensive unity.

"As in yourself glad life the dust inspires
To various functions, so the Soul Divine
Inspires the constellations, shining, through
As from your eyes the spring of life in you
Shines outward. Hence, and not from dense or rare,
Complexions of the different stars compare
So variously; their lights derived from whence
Is every manner of all excellence.

Canto III.

The Sun which warmed me first to fair Love's heat
Had now revealed me Truth, as bare, as sweet,
By proof and by disproof interpreted;
And I thereat, to own in measure meet
That I was throughly answered, raised my head,
Intending speech. But such a sight was mine
To hold me straightly to itself, that I
Forgot my purpose. As translucent glass,
Or shallow water where the light will pass
Clear to the bottom, mirrors those who gaze.
Faint as a white pearl on as white a brow,
So there were many faces round me now
Eager for speech. Narcissus' error here
My sight reversed. I thought: 'Reflections shine
Of those who stand behind me'. Round I turned;
But naught beheld, and from that mystery
Altered my glance mine own sweet guide to see;
And glowing in those sacred eyes I met
A smile at my confusion.

"Wonder not,"

She said: "that in mine eyes is merriment,
Seeing thee thus thy timid feet withdraw
From the firm ground, preferring vacancy,
Thy childlike wont in all things. Those you see

Are truest substance; relegated here
For failure of their vows of chastity.
Speak with them: heed: believe. The verity
Of light with which their souls are satisfied
Allows not that they turn their feet aside
From truth's conclusions."

I thereat, to one
Who seemed most eager to converse, began:
"O well-created Spirit, who dost feel
That sweetness which can never words reveal
To those who have not tasted life divine,
Intense, eternal - joy to hear were mine
If thou wouldst tell thy name, and show the lot
You share with your companions."

She thereon
Gave me a glance that with glad radiance shone,
And smiled assent: "Our love refuseth not
So fair a wish. As prompt it drops the bar
As to the courts of God the gateways are
Made wide to those who would Love's likeness share.
I was a Sister, sworn to chastity,
Not stranger to thee once. Of right I wear
A greater beauty now, but search with care
Thy memory, and this radiance shall not be
Impenetrable. Piccarda once was I,
Who, with the blessed ones around me here,
Am stationed in this slowest-moving sphere.

"Our passions now no lowlier flame can know
Than of the Holy Spirit by which we glow,
Informed by that celestial mystery,
And in that form exulting.

"This low spot
Is given to us whose vows continued not
Inviolable from the world's assault."

I said:

"From God such glowing splendour now transmutes
Your previous beauty that my mind delayed
In recollection of its old conceits.
But now, through its most radiant attributes,
Thy face is evident that before I knew.
But tell me, ye who bide so lowly here,
Have ye no longing for the loftier seats,
The more of Heaven to see, or dwell more dear,
And closer to the Highest?"

A smile at this
Lightened her eyes, and those who crowded near
Smiled with her. Then she spoke, and all the bliss
Of Love's first flame, it seemed, was hers to sing,
She was so joyous in her answering.

"Brother, the quality of our Love doth still
The impulse of rebellion; all our will
Being God's only. Here we rest content.
What God hath in his perfect counsel meant
In our assorting is our certain good.
Incapable of a different thirst are we,
And, that you may the clear occasion see,
Consider that Love rules omnipotent
From threshold unto threshold, from this low
Soon-circling moon, that for our home we know,
To the vast Ultimate Heaven. And think again.
What is Love's nature? Love itself were vain
If envy could corrupt it. Love must be
Surrender by its own necessity
Unto the God from Whom itself derives.
No more desire in emulation strives,
But all our joy is in this will supreme;
And thence is His joy also, that our wills
Find peace in His - the universal sea
Which to Itself all that Itself creates,
And all that Nature thence originates,
Draws in divine attraction."

So to me

Came understanding of how Heaven fulfils
Its Paradise entire, although the grace
Of the Chief Good is not in every place
Rained down in like abundance. But, as when
One food is eaten to satiety
While appetite remains, the while we say
Thanks for the platter that is moved away,
In the same breath we ask a different dish,
So I with pleading gesture spoke my wish
That she should draw the shuttle further through,
To the web's end. And she replied thereto:
"Now heavened in a loftier place than I
Is one who once beneath your earthly sky
Came to high merit and life perfected;
Who founded that veiled rule of those whose vows
That they till death will take the Heavenly Spouse
To lie beside them only, He doth bless
With glorious acceptation, if no less
Of love than Heaven requires impel their vow.

"While girlhood yet was green the world I fled,
Following the passion that she taught. To Wed
The cloister only was I vowed. I wore
The habit of her order. But to me
Came men more prone to ill than good. They tore
My hands reluctant from that hold: the shame
God knoweth that my later life became.

"And she beside me, whose bright spirit doth shine,
On my right hand, with all the light divine
Our sphere contains, accepts this tale of mine
For herself also. She alike was vowed:
She also ravished from that sisterhood
By the sharp violence of her closest kind;
Yet when the shadow of the sacred veil
Drew from her, and reluctant use allowed
Inferior pleasure, still her heart withstood
The sieges of the world. It dwelt behind
The veil of its own chastity. Her light
Is that of Constance, once of worldly height,

Who, to the second blast of Suabia,
Bore him who was the third and final might."

So said she, and her speech was turned to song,
Ave Maria, and the while she sang
She faded from my sight, as sinks a stone
In the dark water's depth. Mine eyes so long
As sight allowed pursued her. Left alone
I sought anew my keen need, and turned
Toward Beatrice, but so brightly burned
Her glance upon me that my sight declined
Endurance of its light at first to find,
Which made me tardier in my questioning.

Canto IV.

Being set between two foods, exactly alike
To call of appetite, exactly placed
At equal distance from his reach, a man
Might starve before his hungry teeth should taste
Of either banquet, while desire would pull
Two ways at once with similar strength; and so
A lamb between two ravening wolves might show
No motion either right or left to go,
In equapoise of terror; or a hound
Between two hinds in cloven doubt might stand,
And both find safety from its lust to kill.
And therefore if no present words I found
Vext by perplexities on either hand
Of equal urgency, my defect of will
I blame not, nor defend. My peace I held;
But on my face desire was painted so
That words would never with so warm a glow
Have made petition; and Beatrice took
The part of Daniel when he read the dream
Before he gave its meaning, which dispelled
The misdirected wrath that made the King
Unjustly cruel.

"Yes," she said, "I see
How two desires at once entangle thee
That neither comes to previous birth. 'If will,'
Your mind protests, 'be constant to the good,
Although frustrated from the thing it would,
How can ulterior violence rightfully
Reduce its measure of desert?'

"And still
More gallful is thy next perplexity,
Which sees the souls, as Plato's doctrine said,
Heavened in their stars, and so, to ease thy doubt,
I treat it first. Of all the seraphim,
Not he to God the closest - Samuel,
Moses or John - not Mary herself, doth dwell
In higher heaven than those thine eyes have seen,
Nor different timing of their years hath been,
Nor will be. None God's circle stays without,
Nor fails its beauties to augment. They share
The same sweet life with difference, each aware
Of its own narrow portion of the same
Eternal Inspiration. That they here
Are visible to thee, does not mean this sphere
Contains them, but informs thee that they claim
The least celestial eminence. Needs must be
That speech they use, to reach your faculty
Of apprehension, that your senses bring
In fashioned tribute to the intellect,
As doth the Scripture, showing God erect,
Manlike, with feet and hands; so furnishing
An image that profounder meaning veils.
And so the Church's teaching represents
Gabriel and Michael in the guise of men,
And Tobit's healer.

"Timaous' argument
- Be literal value to his words applied -
Swerves from the truth I tell thee, for he saith
That spirits to their own stars return at death,
As to a dwelling which they only left

When Nature from the eternal matrix cleft
That which should animate an earthly clay.
Yet haply words from meaning branched away,
Intending truth no wisdom should deride;
That influence, from their starry hosts which came
For honour or dishonour, praise or blame,
Returns unto them when its work is done.

"So may his shaft a truth have reached; but yet
This truth misunderstood the world hath set,
Almost the whole voice of the world, astray,
To call on Jupiter and Mars, as they
Were ultimate gods..

"Thy next perplexity
Hath less of venom, for it could not lead
Thy mind to leave me, though our justice seem
Unjust by mortal standards, as you say.
It is not hectic iniquity
That marvels of the heavenly truth you see
Which foils your understanding. Faith's debate
Is here; and since your mind hath wit to read,
I will expound it to you. Violence
Implies that he who suffers naught submits,
And naught contributes, to his loss. But those
With whom you spoke were partial to oppose
Their wills to that which wrought their vows' offence.
For, if the will be constant, soon or late
Resistance triumphs. Can a flame be bent
So that it will not straighten? Wrench it down
A thousand times, it will not rest content
Until it rise again its natural way.
But if it bend itself, it doth abet
The violence which assaults it, though it be
Reluctant of the deed; and thus did they.

"For had their will retained that constancy
Which held St Lawrence to the grid, and made
Mucius against his own hand obdurate,
They had reverted to the holy state

So soon as rapine loosed them. But too rare
Is such inflexibility of will
To rout the violence of the world

"Yet still,
Though I have rendered void thine argument,
I see before thine eyes a straighter doubt,
Where thou shouldst weary ere the way were won,
If thou shouldst take it lonely. Sure is set
This truth upon thy mind, that never one
Of all the blessed can be cast without
The Ultimate Height of Heaven, who faithfully
Held to the primal truth; but thou hast heard
From Piccarda a different-seeming word,
That Constance in devotion did not swerve
From that which godless violence tore away.

"But many a time, my brother, men may see
Thing done unseemly, other ills to flee,
As did Alcmaeon, at his father's prayer,
His mother's life destroy. Behold a son
Impious from filial piety! And so
May violence work upon the will that none
May call it guiltless. Of its fear aware,
It doth not willingly consent to go,
Yet is in choice consenting, to avoid
Some wrong by which it might be worse annoyed.
Piccarda spoke of the uninfluenced will,
And I of that which bent to circumstance:
With difference thus a single truth we show."
So copiously the stream of truth outwelled
Upon me, from the Eternal Spring that held
All truth for its subservance. Sated now
Were both my longings.

"O Divine!" I said,
"Love of the Primal Lover! By thy speech
My thirst is overflowed, my hunger fed,
My spirit livened. But I may not reach
To give thee grace for grace; I can but pray

That what my poor love hath no depths to pay
He Who hath all will grant thee. This I see:
Truth will be sought without satiety
Unless that Truth which doth all truth contain
Illume and guide it to its end; and then
It rests, as some wild creature finds its den,
And sinks to satisfaction. This I see:
That though the mind may wander homelessly,
It need not find at last futility,
But the den waits its patience.

"Wherefore spring
Around truth's feet these shoots of questioning,
Of the blind mould impatient. Ridge by ridge
They urge us to the summit. This doth give
Reverent assurance to my mind to place
Another doubt, that I am weak to bridge,
Before thee for solution. Of thy grace,
Inform me if a man can satisfy
Demands of heaven with other merchandise,
So that the short weight of a broken vow
May not his hope confound."

Beatrice now
Looked at me with such love in such bright eyes
That I might not sustain in any wise
Their beams to meet: mine insufficiency
From that loved heaven so low rejected me.

Canto V.

Then, to interpret that divine regard,
She first made answer: "If it seem too hard
The flame of love-born beauty to sustain,
So that your dazzled eyes contend in vain
Against a greater warmth than earth can know,
Of this thing make no marvel. It is born
From vision of the food, which apprehends
More than is possible to earthly eyes;

And, with its sight, its own advance extends
Toward the apprehended. As you rise,
Somewhat I see your earthly mind replies,
Heating itself at the eternal light,
Which, as it breaks upon your mortal sight,
Must love enkindle to the like degree.

"If aught beside on earth your love seduce
It is from this same source that breaketh through,
Misapprehended though that source may be.

"But for the question that you ask me now,
Can man, you doubt, redeem a broken vow
With other service, that his final state
Be at God's judgement sure beyond debate?"

So Beatrice put my doubt, and straight
Went on to its solution.

"Many gifts
God gave at the creation, from a hand
Most full, and freely opened. Best of all,
Most near to His own nature, and which lifts
Man nearest to Himself, the boon he planned
Was freedom of the will, with which he dowered
The intelligent creation, severally,
As in united action.

"Hence will be
A vow's high value evident to thee
-If from my premise you deduce aright -
Providing only that when man consents
God consent also. For the tribute made
By such surrender is in coinage paid
Most precious, as I showed, and in the act
Itself is evidenced. What thus can be
In substitution for such covenants
Adequate to offer? If you think to use
To different purpose that you pledged, you plan
Of stolen goods to make your husbandry.

"So are you answered on the major count.
But since the church will dispensation give,
Which seems assertion of the contrary,
You needs must longer at the table sit,
As one who, eating a rebellious food,
Requires more patience for digesting it.

"Bend thou thy thoughts to fix the thing I show;
For to perceive a thing and not retain
Is to divert the mind, but naught to know.

"Two matters to the sacrifice pertain:
That which is vowed, and the contracting vow.
The second can no loosened bond allow:
It was of that I spoke in words precise.
Observe, that Hebrews should make sacrifice
Was law beyond exception, but the gift
They laid upon the altar was not so
Fixed beyond changing. Likewise may the vow
Be varied in its sacrifice. But yet
No private judgement should be bold to shift
The burden that the shoulders bear. For he
Will need the white key and the yellow key
That door to open to his soul's release.
And such surrender, for his after-peace
He yet may count as folly, if no more
He yield than he recover. Six to four
Should be the basis of that bargaining.

"It follows that if man shall consecrate
So much to God that it the scale shall tip
Against whatever else of worth he bring,
There can be no redemption. Can he try
A trade for that he hath no means to buy?

"Let no man make to God a random vow,
Look first with steady eyes, and truth allow.
Remember Jephthah, who had done less ill
To own his vow unrighteous than to kill

His daughter, as though God could give consent
To any vow that slew the innocent.

"Such was the fault that Iphigenia wept
When the Greek Leader foully vowed, and kept
The vow best broken. That her face was fair
Brought her to death that sage and simple there
Lamented vainly.

"Men of Christ should be
Apt to no vow except with gravity,
Not feathers every wind can sweep aside,
Not thinking they are cleansed by every tide.
You have the Old and the New testament
For guidance, and the Church's pastoral care.
Let them be your salvation. But beware
Of evil shepherds, led by avarice,
Who offer pardons at an easier price.
Be men, not sheep; lest that ye think and do
Become the mockery of the Christless Jew."

At that Beatrice ceased, and every word
Was printed on my mind, that all I heard
I here can write. She raised her eyes toward
That point from which the earth most quickeneth,
With evident aspiration. As the cord
Still trembles while the loosened shaft hath struck,
So instant to the second realm we rose.
And as we entered that superior sphere
So gladdened did my lady's face appear
That the whole star responsive glowed. Conceive
If the star waked to laughter, what did I,
Used at each trivial change to laugh or grieve
At dictates of my frail mortality.

As when a fishpond's surface tranquil-clear
Is broken by some substance thrown, and they
Who think of food from every side appear
Drawing toward it, so did every way
A thousand splendours close around us now.

And from each spirit came a voice that cried:
"Lo, one by whom our loves are magnified!"
And each, approaching, by an effluent glow
Cast out toward us, did the gladness show
That filled it.

Reader, if my tale should stay,
And naught be told thee of my upward way
Through Heaven, till then unseen by mortal eyes,
Think how thy thwarted questionings would rise
In protest at the dearth my silence gave;
And think therefrom with what keen thirst I longed
To hear from these of what their state might be.

"Oh, blest at birth!" - From these who round me thronged
A voice addressed me - "Thou by grace allowed
The Thrones of the Triumphant here to view
Ere thine own time of earthly strife be through,
We by the light that ranges Heaven are lit,
And therefore, if you seek some share of it,
Fear no refusal here, but ask aloud."

Thereat Beatrice spoke: "Abandon fear.
Ask freely what you will; and what you hear
Believe as from the lips of gods it came."

"Truly," I answered to the spirit who spake,
"I see thou hast that light of heavenly flame.
It sparkles through thine eyes that fall on me.
But who thou art I may not guess, nor see
Why thou art graded here in Mercury,
Which in the sun's light hides itself from men."

So spoke I; and that spirit exceeded then
Its previous brightness. As the sun will rise
Mist-reddened, but will chase the vapours down
By its victorious heat, and clearer skies
Will mount, invested with too bright a crown
For mortal eyes to meet it, so excelled
That spirit in light through crescent ecstasies,

Garmented and regarmented with light:
And answered in the words which next I write.

Canto VI

"When Constantine had led the eagle back
Nearly the whole course of the westward track
Of him of old who took Lavinia,
A hundred and a hundred years and more
The bird of God abode on Europe's shore,
Facing the mountains whence at first he flew.
And there beneath his sacred wings anew
The world he ruled and sheltered. Constantine
Died, and from hand to hand the imperial power
Passed with the change of years, and came to mine.
Caesar I was, and am Justinian,
Who, being prompted by the Primal Cause
Which all pervades me in this holier hour,
Pruned off abortive and redundant laws.

"One time, before my zeal that work began,
I held the heretic belief that one,
One nature only, was in God the Son,
And was content with his divinity.
But Agapetus (God's high pastor he)
By clearer teaching caused mine eyes to see
The truth entire, as plain as is to you
That contradictions are both false and true.
And soon, as with the Church I moved my feet,
God of his grace inspired me to complete
That task, on which the more to concentrate
To Belisarius the imperial fate,
So far as safety must on arms depend,
I wholly trusted. Heaven's right hand in that
Was stretched to aid me with such evident will
As signalled approbation. So I fill
Requirement of thy first request; but more
Its matter makes demand. That thou mayst see
With how much of good right proceedeth he

Who to his own hand doth appropriate
The Holy Standard, and how much is his
Who doth oppose him, thou shalt contemplate
Its sum of virtue which for reverence
Hath made it worthy, from that earliest day
When Pallas died to plant it.

"Thou dost know
How first in Alba for three centuries
It ruled, until the strife of three with three
Its fate decided. Then through seven reigns,
From the raped Sabines to Lucretia's woe,
Thou knowest further the high deeds it wrought,
Brennus and Pyrrhus, and what tale besides
Of mighty princes and confederacies,
From which Torquatus' lofty fame derived,
And that of Quinctius of the combless hair,
The Decii and the Fabii, each of whom
I joy to place within the embalming tomb
Of song which will not fail.

"It overthrew
The swarming Afric host that Hannibal's pride
Led through the glacial Alpine rocks from where
The Po comes swiftly down. Beneath its wing
Scipio and Pompeii in their youth excelled,
With bitter consequence to that stern hill
That overlooks thy birthplace.

"Nigh the time
When the all-brooding heavens designed to bring
The whole world to their own serenity,
It came to the first Caesar's hand, and he,
By Rome's volition, wrought from Var to Rhone,
What knoweth Isere and Arar, and all the Seine,
And every valley of those hills that yield
Their tributes to the Rhone. But after that,
When from Ravenna he crossed the Rubicon,
So soared its sunward flight, to equal it
Not any tongue can speak, nor word be writ.

"Upon Iberia next its host it wheeled,
And then against Durazzo, and thereon
So smote Pharsalia that the Nile's hot shore
Was not too distant to lament the blow.
The eyrie of its birth it saw once more,
Antandros and Simois, and, below,
The grave where Hector lies. An angry wind
Raising again, with death to Ptolemy,
It smote, as lightning smites, Numidia's king.

"Then westward with swift flight it rushed again
Where the Pompeian trumpets shrilled in Spain.
Raised in a different hand, its destiny
Prevailed. Perugia and Modena knew;
And Brutus with his Cassius howls in hell.
When from the asp she took the swift black night
Rather than feel its capturing Claws. It bore
Its peace at last unto the Red Sea shore -
A peace become so absolute, so wide,
That Janus' temple closed.

 "But all before
Wrought by the standard that I boast is naught -
Its brightness dusk, its splendours mean to see -
Regarded with pure heart and clarity,
Beside the terrible vengeance which it did
In the third Caesar's hand. For surely He,
That Living Justice which is life in me,
Inspired him to it as his instrument.
Regard the two-fold marvel! Christ was sent
To feel the vengeance of God, sin's punishment,
And then to Titus was the glory given
To avenge the vengeance for the ancient sin.

"So passed the years. And when the Lombard bit
Into the Church's side, to rescue it
Came the victorious might of Charlemagne,
Beneath the holy ensign's wings to win.

"Now for thyself a judgement make of those
Whom lately I accused of separate sin.
Behold these evils, source of all your woes!
One to the national standard doth oppose
The golden lilies of France, and one doth strain
Its use to be a faction's flag. 'Tis hard
To say who most offendeth. Ghibellines,
Work your designs beneath some different flag!
For lightly may the crowd's allegiance lag
To follow one you have no claim to show.
Nor may the present Charles his Guelphs sustain,
Impious, to drag so great a symbol low.
Let him yet fear the ancient claws that tore
The pelt from many a mightier lion than he.

"Often have children wailed a father's crime,
But let him not suppose at any time
That God the imperial bird will trade away
For those bright lilies which his arms display.

"This small low star on which we meet contains
Good spirits passionate in pursuit of fame
And honour of earthly life, and hence desires
May swerve so far that strength which love requires
Is somewhat lessened for its mounting rays.
But yet no less we give to God the praise,
No less perceive that our deserts and gains
Are justly measured in the perfect scale.
For in us the live justice doth prevail,
And malice may not warp affections here.

"As varying voices make sweet harmony
On earth, so is it this holier sphere.
Degrees of difference make one song entire;
And various flames construct one wheel of love.

"Within this present pearl that Romeo
Shineth whose heel Provencal envy bit
For his most noble work designed and done.
But he, by then who had completed it,

So dealt that the last laughter doth not go
To those whose malice sought his overthrow.

"Four daughters had Duke Raymond, and no son,
Yet each of these became a high princess,
One England's queen, one France's queen; no less
The others to great honour. This was done
By Romeo's wisdom, to Provence who came
A stranger, with a pilgrim's lowliness,
And with a pilgrim's poverty. When disfame
Whispered against him, charging fraud and greed,
So that his lord required a count be made
If any treasure in his hand had stayed,
He more than justly rendered, twelve for ten,
And that no slander in the mouths of men
Might live thereafter, took his mule and staff,
And left that court as naked as he came,
All gifts contemning. Nay, not theirs the laugh.

"But had the world known in what heart he went
In poverty and age from door to door,
Begging by crust and crust his meagre store,
Much as it praiseth, it had praised him more.

Canto VII.

"Lord God of Sabaoth, Holiest and Most High,
Hosanna to the sacred Name we praise
Which by its superlustrous light's descent
Doth kindle all this heavenly firmament
With penetrant fire divine."

I heard him raise
This chant triumphant - he, that Being blest
On whom twin lights in doubled glory rest,
The purifier both of rule and law.
A moment only he and those I saw
Who like himself danced to the sacred strain,
And then, as sudden sparks to darkness fly,

The distance hid them.

"Ask her - ask," I said
Within myself, "entreat her to supply
That living water of truth which twice before
My thirst hath sated." But I bent my head
As one oblivious. Diffident fear was more
Restraint than love of truth was urgency now.

But well she knew how reverence overcame
My difficult speech, and how my head must bow
To but one syllable of her worshipped name,
And short the time she left me thus. A smile
Shone from her eyes upon me, such as well
Might make men blissful in the flames of hell;
And then she spoke: "My thought, which doth not err,
Perceives thy question. *Be the vengeance just,
Can vengeance for that vengeance justly be?*
That query might be answered speedily;
But give me all thy mind, and thou shalt hear
Full revelation of this mystery.

"Because one man, who was not born, declined
Contentment in a wise restraint to find,
Himself he damned, and all his flesh that grew
From him by natural process: all alike
One flesh, one sin. So lay the human crew
In deathly sickness many a century,
Deluded by its own conceits, till He
The Immortal Word of God, that nature drew,
That fallen nature, to Himself anew,
By the sole act of his eternal love.

"Consider this: That nature, reallied
To Him Who made it, cleansed and deified,
Was perfect, sinless as Himself; but yet
Was that same nature which the gates had set
Of Paradise barred against it: its own act
Repudiating its appointed way
Of truth, its life intended. If we weigh

The nature which endured the cross, we say
That never was a juster penalty.
But if the Person who that nature bore
Our judgement ponder, then the punishment
Appears most monstrous. Mark the twofold fact.
God at that deed rejoiced: rejoiced the Jews.
Earth quaked. The outraged heavens open tore.
Perceive the dual truths, and doubt no more
The justice that condemned what God designed.

"But now I see, from thought to thought, thy mind
Maked further question. 'What I hear,' you say,
'Is clear to comprehension. But I see
Not plainly why that only mode should be
The path of our redemption! This decree,
Brother, is mystery to all eyes but those
Which at Love's feet have learnt their litany.

"But since this target draws most shafts which fall
At middle distance, hear the truth that shows
This method worthiest of a choice divine:
Glowing within itself, God's excellence,
Contemning envy where no equal is,
Radiates abroad its everlasting light,
And the assertion of its loveliness
Hath not the finite bound of more or less;
Nor can it be reversed; nor where its seal
Hath stamped God's image, any subsequent night
Obliterate that eternal signature.

"That which down-floweth from this source is free,
Unmeasured, not to mutability
Made subject. As its inspiration pure
Shows us most likeness, so in men must be
Most conquering life; and as they fail therefrom,
Though by but one ray of the eternal light,
They are reduced in their nobility.

"Sin only hath this power, from men to take
The secret likeness of the Eternal Good,

So that their nature with a glow less bright
Return the eternal brilliance. Never more
May it re-enter through that closing door,
Excepting, for the void it digged, it make
Full bulk of reparation: false delight
Being full balanced by just penalty.

"And so, when sinned the first including seed,
Which was mankind in its totality,
Not only Paradise was lost: the night
Sank also on the heavenly dignity
Which was man's previous nature. How shall be
This loss recovered? Ask thyself, and heed
The inevitable answer.

"What shall pass
This gulf of separation? Only here
Two possible fords across its depth appear,
That either God in sole benignity
Shall without satisfaction all remit,
Or man shall compensation make.

"Now fix
Intent thine eyes upon the deep abyss
Of the eternal counsel! Man for this
Was powerless. Could he find humility
Sufficient to abase himself as low
As his false pride had risen, when he defied
The rule of his Creator? Surely no.
And therefore was he hopeless to redeem
Himself from condemnation. Needs must be
That God alone of his own potency
Should the maimed life to heavenly rights restore,
Or both fords in divine duality
Employ for its salvation. God must choose,
The way most Godlike. Every deed the more
Is gracious as itself is pregnated.
With the heart's bounty which itself conceived.
And therefore the Divine Beneficence
Chose the most Godlike mode, Itself to lose

That men might profit: stamping its design
Even on the fallen image that gave offence.

"Not since the first day dawned, until shall fall
The shades of the last night across the sky,
Nay, nor thenceafter, any deed of all
Shall match with this in height of majesty.
God needs must choose the method most divine,
Equal to this. For our redemption He
Bent to the burden of humanity.

"Now, to relieve thy final doubt, which says:
'I see the water, and I see the fire,
The fluid air, the solid earth I see,
And all their mixtures. But what substance stays?
What is their end but mutability?'
I answer this: Although your mind perceived
Apparent contradiction, when I called
All things created incorruptible,
And the material earth abundant shows
The workings of corruption, not indeed
Is contradiction here. This heavenly land,
Brother, with all its sinless angel band,
These may be called created, through and through.
But those base elements observed by you
Are rather by created virtue formed,
Its temporary expression, not itself;
And so the life of plant and brute is warmed
From the out-sparkling of the sacred stars
Thrown downward or withdrawn. But life of thine
Is breathed immediate from the Source Divine,
So that, divorced therefrom, you upward yearn,
And furthest wandering would most fain return.
And hence, if thou recall how first the flesh
That is mankind was kneaded, thou canst see
Good reason for the further life to be."

Canto VIII

The world of men in times now ancient
Held that the Cyprian from her native star
Rained down on earth her love incontinent.
Wherefor they praised her and her amorous care
With blood of sacrifice and votive cry;
And not her only in their false belief
They worshipped, but alike to Dione,
Being her mother, and to Cupid, he
Being her son, their hymns they raised. They told
How once he sat on Dido's knees. They saw
Her dwelling in the star that, overbold,
Twice daily, night and morning, courts the sun.

I knew not, till the upward course was done,
That I that star had gained, but then the law
That makes thereon all beauty manifold
Revealed it to me in Beatrice's eyes,
Which not till then had been in anywise
So lovely, though their previous loveliness
Surpassed inadequate words of earth.

Hast seen
A spark transgress a steadier flame? Hast heard
A voice of constant volume, word by word,
Disturbed by one which alters? So I saw
Lights in that light which torchlike danced, their pace
Varying, I think, through all eternity
According as its vision was theirs. From Him
That cincture which is first the Seraphim
So spirals downward to this circling race.
But now so rapidly from their line they broke
That from cold cloud the invisible thunder-stroke
Falls not so fast. So swift to us they came
That by their motion would the lightning lag;
And from the vanward of their front of flame
Hosanna pealed in such sweet melody
That never shall I shake the longing free
Again to hear it.

One advanced more near

Than came those others. "All who meet thee here,"
He said, "are servants to thy will, to make
Thy joy's occasion. Principalities
Are here who in one circle roll: who slake
One thirst, which thou thyself didst indicate,
Writing on earth: *Oh, ye, whose ecstasies*
Give the Third Heaven its moving life. In us
Love moves so regnant that to pleasure thee
Is sweet as our suspended dance could be."

I raised at first mine eyes in reverence
Toward my Lady to enquire her will,
And having her assurance, turned them thence
To that glad spirit proffering to fulfil
My asking with the prodigality
To which love urged it. "Tell me who you be,"
I said, with ardour like his own, and he
Glowed with exceeding pleasure thereat, intense
Of light beyond conception. Changing thus,
He answered: "Short the space the world below
Confined me fleshly. Had it not been so,
Much evil had been spared which yet must be.
Joy is it that conceals my form from thee,
A rose out-radiant: like a creature clad
In silk, its own creation. Love you had
Onetime for me, with likely cause, for lo!
Had life endured, I had not failed to show
More than the flowerless leaves of love for thee.

"The left bank of the Rhone, anear the sea,
After it takes the Sorga, looked to me
To be its lord at the appropriate hour,
As did that corner of Ausonia
Which hath three cities for its diadem
Bari, Gaeta, and Catona, where
Tronto and Verde mingle with the sea.
Already on my brows two crowns of power
Shone bright. Those banks the Danube's waters sweep,
After they leave the German lands, were mine,
And soon alike would fair Trinacria,

Which between Pachynus and Pelorus
Darkens above the gulf tormented most
By Eurus (not for wrath of Typhoeus,
But for the sulphur that ariseth there)
Have looked to have its future kings through me
From Charles and Rudolf spring, had not the scourge
Of evil lordship, which doth break the tie
Of prince and subject, roused Palermo's cry
From streets heart-broken: *Die, thou tyrant, die.*
And, had my brother in good time allowed
His heart to ponder that which all may see
Of Catalonia's greedy poverty,
The sails of flight upon his barque to crowd
He had not loitered: even furtherfold
Will evil cargo weight its cumbered hold,
Unless his own or other's wits provide
Some swift remede. His close parsimony
- Mean sapling seeded from a generous tree! -
Will soon have need of different soldiery
From those who make their aim his chests to fill."

I answered: "Surely am I satisfied
That what I see, you too, with Heaven to guide,
See likewise: rather say, twice joyed am I
Not only that thyself, but Heaven most high
Accords in this conclusion. Joy supplied;
Give wisdom also if thou wilt. Reveal,
I pray thee, how sweet seed of earthly stem
Can bring forth bitter."

Thus he answered me:
"If I expose a single thought to thee
Thy doubt is ended: that which lies behind
Will meet thy vision. The revolving Good,
That through this whole realm which thou now dost climb
Permeates, with virtue fills these spheres. In them
It makes provision, being itself sublime,
Perfect for all the creatures you will find
Various in each; not only to exist,
But blissful to abide, that all subsist

Not as by random chance, but orderly,
As shafts that reach the mark which He designed
Who loosed them from the bowstring. Else would be
Chaos in Heaven itself, and art divine
Blurred and confused thereby, defaced and wrecked.
And could that be, except the intellect
That moves these stars should have a like defect?
And could that be except the Primal One,
Whose hand should fail his creatures to direct,
Should be Himself defective? Have I done?
Or must I sate you with more argument?"

And I thereat: "You have no need to say
A further word thereon, for well I see
Nothing in Nature can imperfect be
To execute its mission."

He went on:

"Then tell me: Would men walk the harder way
Were they uncited and uncivilised?"
I answered: "Surely that is evident.
For that I ask no reason."

"Then reflect.

How could that be, except that men direct
Efforts diverse to different ends, and so
Be various in their lives and offices?
Your Master wrote of this, and answered: No."

So far he led me on by argument,
Logically deducing point from point, but now
He reached conclusion: "Therefore one is born
A lawyer, Solon; one is Xerxes; one
A priest, Melchizedek; and one is he
Who, soaring vainly sunward, lost his son.

"For that which seeks a mortal tenement
From the revolving Source of life, is not
To one selected fleshly home assigned,
But, by the wisdom of the Eternal Mind,

Indifferent where it find the hostelry
Which it can enter, and its seal impress
On the soft wax of human infancy.

"Esaua from Jacob's seed was sundered thus,
And from such Sire was gendered Quirinus
That Mars was called his father. Time would see
Son following sire in long monotony
Were they not varied by divine decree,
As thus I have expounded.

"Now thy doubt
Is silenced. That which lay behind is brought
Beneath thy vision. If I answer more
It shows how greatly I delight in thee.
- With this corollary I gird thee round:
If Nature find in aught disharmony,
As seed that falleth on unfertile ground
She makes that birth abortive. Every flower
Blooms, if at all, in its propitious hour.
And if your world had equal wit to see
The meaning of this lesson, it would be
With those who serve its needs more satisfied.
But he whose hand the sword-hilt fits they rear
To pray within the cloister, while the spear
They force into a nerveless hand. A king
They make of him whose gift is oratory,
And of the studious make a strengthless king.
So is the firm road vacant, while they tire
Alongside, foiled in uncongenial mire.

Canto IX.

Thy Charles, fair Clemence, thus enlightened me;
And more he told, of how deception's snares
Should trammel his descendants; but he said
Thereafter: "Tell ye naught, for who would spread
A net revealed beforehand?" Silenced thus
I say no more than that just Heaven prepares

A well-bought wailing to avenge thy woe.

But now the sphere of love had turned to meet
The effluent source of all its genial heat,
The sun's high glory, ample to bestow
All that is good through Heaven that all things know.
(Ah, souls deluded, creatures impious!
Who from such light can twist your souls aside
To the vain joys that sin's low tempests hide.)
And in that dawn another splendour shone
Toward me, by its more intensity
Of outward brilliance speaking its desire
For converse. Licensed by Beatrice's eyes,
I answered: "O Blest Spirit! Reveal to me,
I charge thee, whom thou art, that I to thee
May make my thought transparent."

Then that fire,
Which yet I knew not, turned its singing core
To words as buoyant with joy my will to do:
"In that depraved Italian land which lies
Between where Brenta and Piave rise,
And stands Rialto, is a hill that rears
To no great eminence; but down it came,
Raging, and ravening all the land, a flame
Of blackening fury. Of one seed are we.
Cunizza was I called, and here I glow
Because this star's light was mine overthrow.
But joyous am I to indulge my lot.
I fell; but in a fall that grieves me not
To backwardly regard it. Hard to thee
May seem this saying; but it will not be
If from the general herd's thou separate
Thy judgement. This most dear and shining gem
Which closest to me keeps, my heavenly friend,
Hath still a fame on earth which shall not end
Until four times again revolved shall be
The period of his first centenary.

"All men for fame contend, but which of them

A second lifetime's memory wins? How few!
This is not in the meaner thoughts of those
Whom Tagliaments and Adige enclose,
Chastised who are, taught who will not be.
But shall not soon the blood of Padua's dead
Darken the clear Bacchiglione red,
Whose necks for service are too obstinate?

"And one there is who goeth with lifted head,
Ruling where Sile and Cagnano wed,
For whose regardless feet the fatal net
Is being woven, if it be not spread.

"Loud cry the sorrows of men, but louder yet
A wail shall rise from Feltro. None shall find
A man to Malta for foul crime consigned
To match the treachery of Ferrara's priest.
God's priest to prove himself a partisan
Betraying refugees! A priest of God!
Large were the bowl would hold Ferrara's blood,
And weary who should count it, clot by clot,
That Della Tosa through that shame shall shed.
Yet even that foul deed divideth not
From daily practice of that land.

"Above
Are shining mirrors - thrones their earthly name -
In which reflection shows if God approve
The words I give you."

Here she ceased, as one
Whose mind reverted to the wheeling flame
In which again she mingled, leaving near
That other joy, of which she lately said
It had on earth a lustre. Now it shone
Like a great ruby by the sunlight smit.
For in that region those who joy of it
Glow to the measure of their ecstasy.
As those who sorrow on our earth below
Turn to the shadows of the night they know.

"God seeth all," I said, "and you in Him,
Blest spirit, see so far that naught can dim
Thy farthest vision. Never wish can be
Within thee frustrate. Wherefore then dost thou
Delay to please me with that voice which now
Delights this glowing Heaven eternally
Amidst the singing of those Holy flames
Cowled by their own six wings? Reversed with thee,
I had not waited thus to hear thee plead."

He answered: "From that ocean which contains
The earth's inhabited lands, an arm is thrust
Against the course of the advancing sun.
So far that greatest valley, water-filled,
Extends, that its Levantine eve is one
With noon above its western gates. Was I
A shoreman of those seas, in lands that lie
Between the Ebro and the Macra's stream
Which parts the Tuscan from the Genoese.
Almost alike for sunset and sunrise
The place from whence I sprang and Bougiah lies,
Which once in battle made its harbour steam
With its own blood-fall. Folco was my name,
And this bright heaven, to which by right I came,
Was then my ruler, as it owns me now.

"For never Belus' daughter, when she wronged
Both Sichaesus and Creusa, burned as I,
While youth allowed it; nor Rhodope's maid
By Phaedra's wandering son too long betrayed;
Nor he who closed his heart on Iole.

"Yet here we grieve not for remembered sin,
But smile in recollection that herein
Burned the High Value which inspired and led.
Here see we in recovered unity
The Beauty that inflamed our earthly love
Joined to the Good with which this world above
Draws back the wanderings of the world below.

"But that thou leave us well content, I show
The furthest questions which thou hast not said.
For thou the name of this near light wouldst know
Which shineth at my side as dazzling-clear
As sunlight in pure water. Know that here
Hath Rahab found her high tranquillity,
Being received this exalted sphere,
Which from your earth its shadow's point receives,
As most illustrious of your mortal dead,
Being first of all Christ's triumph rescued
To enter here among us. Well beseems
That she be shown as palm of victory
In this, or other, heaven; because that she
Joshua's first glory in the Sacred Land
Was bold to favour; which supremacy,
Scarce memorable to the Church today,
Might be eclipsed too lightly.

"That fair site
Which first he planted who his shoulders turned
Against his Maker - that fair city of thine
Coins the accursed golden flowers which shine
A baleful light to lead God's lambs astray.
For who should be their shepherds - what are they
But wolves at that incitement? Therefore lie
The writings of Evangelist and Divine
Unopened, while their thumb-soiled margins show
How many to the sterile pastures go
Of the Decretals, for the florins earned.

"Thereon are pope and cardinals intent,
And to the house of Christ indifferent,
Where Gabriel's wings stretched over Nazareth,
Which now the Paynims ravish. But I see
The hour when Rome's too-arrogant Vatican,
Blessed by their graves who Peter led, shall be
Released and cleansed from that adultery."

Canto X.

He, the one Value, primal, uncreate,
Ineffable, gazing on His only son
With that translucent love which constantly
They breathe through all things and all space, did form
All heaven-revolving matter and mind to be
Of such high-ordered merit that those who see
See also something of Himself therein.

Therefore, O reader, raise thine eyes with me
To where the motions of the wheels divine
Cross at their equinoctial point, and gaze
Raptured by art so heavenly-fair that He
In nightless contemplation doth survey
That which He fashioned everlastingly.

Consider how restrained obliquity
So works for earth that, were its motion more,
Changes of season were too violent;
And, were they less, how much of potency
Were dead in arid wastes. I need not say
On such a theme extended argument.
Let each man feed him where the feast is spread.

That minister of God, the regnant sun,
Who doth our earth with Heaven's live seal impress,
And measure for us time's perpetual round,
Was at that point already shown, and there
Pursued the spiral course which earlier found
Its light arise with each succeeding day.
And I was with it, though no more aware
Than one of his next moment's thought may be.
Beatrice to that goal had guided me
From good to better raised so instantly
That time of transit was not.

Think how bright
Must be their shining in that home of light,
Who not by colour but by brilliance showed

Their presence; light in light's intensity.

Where I to call to aid all genius
The earth hath known, and all traditional art
For their interpretation, how they glowed
Would mock the attempted telling. Yet belief
May well outrun perception. Well for us
If that I tell our longing eyes shall see!

And if we fail of adequate fantasy,
What wonder is it? What to face the sun,
Is mortal vision at its best, and none
Conceives more splendour than his eyes might see.

So were we there in that Fourth Household set
Of the High Father who doth all provide;
And showeth, in itself all satisfied,
How He doth breathe through Heaven, and how beget.

Beatrice said: "Give thanks to that High Sun
In Whose great light the angels' wings are spread,
That He to this material sphere hath led
Thine upward flight."

No mortal heart inclined
With soul more prostrate nor devout than I,
Hearing those words, myself in God to find
With will surrendered wholly. So it bent
That, for the moment, even Beatrice went
Entirely from it.

That oblivion
She did not, though her heart perceived, resent,
But the glad laughter of her eyes outshone
In such augmented splendour that, thereon,
Was shattered in my mind its singleness
To manifold perceptions.

Round us bent
A glowing girdle, living, conquering,

That more than all it showed could sweetly sing,
Making itself a circling crown, and we
Its centre. Thus Latona's daughter shows
Her golden zone, with light impregnated,
When the cold air retains each shining thread.

The courts of Heaven, from whence returned am I,
Jewels of such dear value beautify
As may not be to this dark air conveyed.
They have a beauty none may bear away,
A glory not to weeping eyes displayed.
Such was their song. And though from Heaven I come
Who saw that wonder, and that song who heard,
I may not utter one revealing word.
Ye who for beauty in that mart would trade,
Wing your ascension there - or ask the dumb.

Three times, as stars around their polar star,
Those ardent suns around us whirled, but then
As dancers when the music breaks they stood,
Who pause alert to catch its notes again.
And one within itself I heard begin:
"Since in thy heart the ray of grace divine
(Whereat the Very Love is Lit to shine,
And, being lit, by loving grows therein)
Hath in thee glowed so brightly as to guide
Thy steps to climb this stair which none descends
Except for reascension, who denied
His vial's wine to sate thy thirst should be
No more in that perverse refusal free
Than water that should fail to seek the sea.

"Now wouldst thou learn the name of each bright flower
Which forms this amorous girdle, to embower
The beauty of thy lady, who doth give
Valour to thy feet to Heaven invade . . . I am
One who found pasture as a fortunate lamb
Of Dominic's sacred flock: he led the way
Where those might fatten well who did not stray.
And shining closest on the right to me,

Is Albert of Cologne. My master he:
I, Thomas Aquinas. If all the rest
You seek to know who form the circle blest,
Direct thine eyes the radiant wreath around,
Following my words. The next exceeding glow
Is Gratian, by his light who smileth so,
Who did so much to bring to common ground
Ecclesiastical and secular law,
That was approved in Paradise. Beyond
You see in radiance that adorns our song
That Peter who did no way boast to say
That, as the widow's mite, his toil would pay
His treasure to Holy Church. The fifth you see,
Fairest and first among us, that is he,
Solomon, of whom the doubtful world below
Thirsteth the news of his great love to know,
Of where it brought him at the last. His mind
Soared to such height; and in the depths profound
Of wisdom delved beyond comparison.
The next that shines so clearly luminous,
Is he who most the angels' ministry
Probed, and their nature: Dionysius;
And then that little laughing light beside
Is he whose Christian pleading fortified
Augustine's wisdom. Now, from light to light
Following my words, thou hast the eighth in sight,
Wherein the sainted soul rejoiceth well,
Having uncovered thy world's falsity
To all who heed him. In Cieldauro lies
His body, whence the soul outchased did rise,
Exiled and martyred, to this peaceful bliss.

"See next the flaming breath of Isidore,
And then of Bede, and Richard, who was more
Than man in contemplation. Last is he,
The circle rounded, next again to me,
Who pondered death and felt it came too slow.
It is the everlasting light of him,
Sigier, who in the *Vicus Straminis*
Syllogised truths that earned the hate of men."

He ceased; and as in God's dear Church below
His spouse salutes Him with her matin hymn,
That He may love her, and exalt her bliss,
Wherein one part will thrust and one will draw
In such sweet chiming that the spirit content
With love is overfilled, and overflows
To hear it, so I watched that glorious wheel
Resume its revolution, and rejoice
In such glad harmony of voice to voice
As may not here be told; and only be
Where joy is anchored everlastingly.

Canto XI.

Oh, blind insensate cares of mortal men!
Oh, falsehood of all arguments that turn
Eyes downward to the dust, and wings, designed
For soaring, earthward plane! One toiled to learn
Labyrinths of earthly law; and one to find
Wisdom in words for mortal cures; and one
The priesthood studied; one dominion sought
By violence, or by shrewd diplomacy;
One plunder; and the next by trafficking
To prosper; one by carnal joys was caught;
And one in ease would find tranquillity;
The while, from all inferior things made free,
Thus gloriously at Beatrice's side was I
Received and owned in Heaven.

When he spake,
And my round-wandering eyes the circle showed,
Pausing and turning in their harmony,
His light drew inward to itself; but glowed
A moment later with a hue more bright
The smile of its communicating light.

"As glows," he said, "the Eternal Light in me,
So gazing in that Sacred Source I see

Thy thoughts' occasions, and the way they take.
Two things you question, and would find reply,
Not in such apprehending light as I
Absorb without division of words, but so
That understanding on the road may go
Which mortal reason treads. You marked me say:
'For those who stray not should good fattening be.'
And then of Solomon: 'none saw like he.'
But here we must distinguish narrowly.

"The all-ruling Providence (Whose counsels lie
In such far depth that their profundity
Baffles the searching of created eyes)
So that the spouse of Him Who once so dear
Her wedlock purchased with His blood's red rain,
Rising responsive to His conquering cries
Should go securely to her sought delight,
Unspoiled of lowlier lovers, did ordain
A prince on either side to form her train.
One as a seraph in his ardour burned,
And one, cherubic in his wisdom, turned
A facet earthward of the light divine.

"Of both of these it were too much to tell,
For he who the one counsellor praiseth well
Speaketh of two, so like their virtues shine.

"Between Tupino and the stream that falls
Down from the blest Ubaldo's chosen hill
The slope is green a lofty mount below.
Therefrom Perugia feeleth heat or chill
Through Porta Sole; and behind it calls
Nocera for relief which doth not come
From its hard yoke, or Gualdo's. From this slope,
Where most it levels, there was born a sun
Splendid as any dawn from Ganges came;
And therefore who that lovely place shall name
Let him henceforth not Assisi say
But Orient.

"From the dark horizon bar
To climb earth's skies he had not mounted far
Before some strengthening from his light she felt.
For in his youth he came a dame to woo
To whom most others would their doors undo,
As to the knocking of death, reluctantly.
Against his father in her cause he fought
Until he wed her in the holy court
To which he gave allegiance, while beside
His father stood surrendered. From that day
He found her every hour a closer bride
Who had been widowed such long time before
- A thousand and a hundred years and more -
Despised, obscure, her very memory dim,
Until he sought her out who sought not him.

"It had not saved her soiled repute that she
Serenely at the side of Amyclas
Had heard great Caesar's voice unmoved, though he
Shook all the world to fear. Her constancy
And courage had not saved her name, that she
Her place had taken on the cross of Christ
While Mary wept below.

"Too covertly
I will not turn my words. Of poverty
I speak, and Francis. Lovers true were they,
As you shall hear it in plain speech. No less
Through loss of years became their tenderness,
Their joyous converse, and their amorous play.
Still in their cloudless harmony they found
Wonder and love to sacred thoughts that led,
Till others who their concord joys beheld
In such exceeding peace would find their share.

"For that the venerable Bernard shed
His hindering sandals, ran, and thought too slow
His speediest pace. Oh wealth neglected! Ground
Untilled though fertile! Now Egidius
Unsandals: now Sylvester. Following so

This bride who gives her spouse such dear delight.

"So, with his bride, the Master led the way,
Father to those the humble cord who wore.
He did not face the world abased of brow
That he was Bernardone's heir, and now
Despised and fallen to estate so low,
But kingly he disclosed to Innocent
His heart's firm purpose, and from him received
His Order's earliest license. After that,
As those poor folk became more numerous
Who on the same bare path he opened went,
Then was a second crown conferred on him,
Whose life, for earthly praise too marvellous,
In Heaven's high glory is more fitly sung,
His Order being by Honorius
Confirmed and honoured. Challenging martyrdom,
Thereafter at the Soldan's court he preached
Of Christ, and those who serve Him. Finding naught
Of fertile ground in that proud infidel court,
He stayed not vainly, but returned, and tilled
A better crop upon Italian ground.

"Then on the barren windswept rock which lies
Between the Tiber and the Arno, he
Received from Christ the ultimate sign he bore
Upon his limbs the last two years that filled
His earthly record. When that Heavenly Power,
Who for such simpleness his life had willed,
Called him to rise to the eternal dower,
Which height he had deserved by lowliness,
Then to his brethren, as his rightful heirs,
His lady he commended, that no less
Than he had served her they should serve her too,
And constant as himself her will should do,
And love her, as he loved her, faithfully.

"And after that from her dear breast his head
He lifted, rising to a realm more fit.
Yet of his earthly body still would he

Continue constant to the dame he wed,
Unclad, uncoffined, barely leaving it
To the bare earth that bore it.

"Think you now
What worth was in that other, who could be
Colleague to him, to steer a portward barque
Steadfast across the deep and lonely sea
To Peter's sign. Such was our patriarch.
Wherefore who followed him obediently
Is cargoed with good wares for marketing.

"But now his flock hath grown so lecherous
For other pastures than his choice supplied,
That they must wander in new glades, and thus
The further that they stray the less they bring
Of milk in udders that such journeying,
Before they reach to fold at even, dried.

"Some are there whose fair lives this charge rebut,
Still keeping closely to their Leader's side,
But little cloth it takes their cowls to cut.

"Now if my words have winged a swerveless way,
And if thou hast not failed good heed to pay,
And if thou wilt recall mine argument,
You will observe the plant they prune away;
And will perceive the hard rebuke I meant
To those rebellious sheep, when first I said:
'Good fattening is for those who do not stray.'"

Canto XII.

Even as that blest flame's last word was said,
The sacred millstone of their circle sped
Around us once again, but had not made
Its whirling; cincture once complete before
Another circle zoned it, which the more
Gave motion to its motion: to its song

A song extended: singing that so far
Exceeded our own in any music played
From earthly craft's devisings tubular,
Or notes of Muse, or Syren magical,
As is original to reflected light.

As on a sunstruck mist two bows appear
When Here calls her handmaid Iris near,
Curve over curve, in colours equal-bright,
The outer from the inner born, as might
Be Echo's wandering voice, when, love-denied,
To one who would not hear she vainly cried.
- Echo consumed of love as such mists are
When the sun finds them - like the glorious bow
Which bends above the storm, and men foreknow
That flood no more the fertile earth shall mar,
As God with Noah made treaty, so did they,
The flaming sempiternal roses glow;
Their revolutions round us garlanding
In union of duality wherein
Song answered song, and flashing light to light
Was radiant.

Then that dancing festival
Its joyous and benignant circle paused,
Accordant instant as two eyes will blink,
And came a voice from one far light that caused
My motion toward it as the needle swings
Forever constant to its calling star.

He said: "The love which causeth light in me
Its tribute to that other Leader sings
Whose servant hath exalted mine so far.
For meet it is to all eternity
That they whose war was one - his Chief and mine -
Should ever in one blended glory shine.

"For when with laggard steps the ranks of Christ
Behind his standard straggled, timorous, faint,
Ragged and few, bereft of its high-priced

Equipment, hardly to be found anew,
Its everlasting Leader, of His grace,
Not of its worth proved worthless, did review
Its dire condition, and His wisdom gave
Two champions adequate His spouse to save;
And those who heard them speak, who saw them do,
Renewed their broken ranks, and dressed again
Its front of confident war.

"Not far from where
Blows from the sea the gentle western air,
When with fair spring Europa's trees are glad
Returning to the summer life they had
With freshly-opening leaves: not far from where
The interminable waves on the long shore
Roll in, and break, and roll for evermore,
In from that limitless immensity
Where the sun finds no land, but meets the sea,
Lies Calahorra, fortunate, immune,
Sheltered from woe by that sufficient shield
Whereon the lion subdues and then doth yield,
Even there was born that friar faith-amorous,,
That holy athlete, pitiless to his foes,
(Which were Christ's also), but benign to those
Who followed in the faith he taught.

"The boon
Of living virtue was his gift so soon
That ere his birth, Heaven's meaning to express,
His pregnant mother was a prophetess;
And when the espousals at the font had been
Completed, mutual to his faith and him
In bargain of salvation, she who made
Assent on his behalf that night beheld,
In vision when the veil of sense dispelled,
The fruitful star that with his life should rise,
And through his heirs continue.

"So began
His life, and that his spirit should be displayed

Even in construction of his name, a power
From these high regions those who named him led
To call him Dominic, as one possessed
By Him Whom he would serve so utterly,
Being Christ-chosen for the husbandman
To prune the orchard which a negligent hour
Had left profuse and barren. Well did he
Reveal himself to be Christ's messenger,
As Christ's familiar was he shown to be.
For Christ's first counsel, which was poverty,
Was the first love his life made manifest.
And she who nursed would find him where he lay,
In wakeful gravity, as who should say:
'I see for what I came, the destined quest.'

"Oh Father, in good truth Felice named!
O Mother, Giovanna in good truth!
If these high names their first high meanings bear.
Not as men toil to Thaddeus emulate,
Or him of Ostia, for the world's reward,
But with God's manna for a nobler bait
In briefest space of diligence was he
Such able doctor of divinity
That he was fit the vineyard's rows to dress,
Which soon the vinetender's unthriftiness
Will cause to droop discoloured.

"To that seat,
Once more benignant to the faithful poor
- Not in itself debased, but only in him
Who sitteth on it, being degenerate -
He made petition, not for leave to skim
Rich cream from God's donations, four from eight,
Nor for preferment at a vacancy,
Nor that he might himself the tithes retain
Meant for relief of innocent poverty,
But for full license was his only plea
Against the heretic world to strive, and gain
Such harvest from the holy seed as here
In four-and-twenty plants surrounds you now.

"Then, with sound doctrine and strong purpose wed,
Armed with the apostolic right, he led,
Torrential as from some deep artery
The life-stream leaps; and in this outrage smote
The ugly stumps of heresy, fiercest where
They made most gross projection.

"Thence there spread
The diverse streamlets of the faith that fed
The Catholic orchard, giving leafage fair
And more abundant blossom.

"Such was he;
And by the chariot's one wheel wherein
The Holy Church her civil strife did win
May well be judged that other's excellence,
Of whom did Thomas with such courtesy
Inform you first. But no continuance
That chariot's circles show. Its topmost track
So long unused that no man heeds the lack
Of good wheel-surface to soft mould declined.
His should-be followers, who were vowed to tread
Their Master's footsteps, now have turned them back
So that the toe-mark in the heel you find.
And soon shall be revealed at harvesting
The fruits of evil culture, when the tare
Wails at wain-loading that it is not there.

"I say with confidence no leaf of all
Our volume now the closest search should find
To bear the boast of that obedience
Which neither runs in front nor lags behind.
Not Acquasparta nor Casale see
The light true-shining. In one place is he
Who binds too loosely, in the other, one
Who draws the cord too tightly.

"I was named
Bonaventura - Bagnoregio

My place of dwelling - through my life I aimed
To rank the high things high, the low things low.
Illuminato and Augustine here
Beside me shine; among the first unshod
The lowly cord allowed them friends to God.
Hugh of St. Victor with these lights appear
And Peter Mangiadore. Hispano
Is here, who in twelve books taught truth below;
Nathan the seer; the metropolitan
Chrysostom; Anselm; and Donatus, who
Deigned to the art of words his hand to set;
Rabanus is here; and the Calabrian,
Joachim shining at my side, who knew
The art of prophecy."

To rivalling speech
I stirred at Thoma's discreet discourse,
And at his kindled courtesy, the debt
To cancel of so great a paladin;
And with approval of my purpose each
Stirred also of this goodly company.

Canto XIII.

Let him who that great sight I saw would see
Hold in firm mind this glorious imagery:
From those night-scattered stars whose rays intense
Pierce the dense air to reach our mortal sense
Most brightly, take fifteen, and add to them
The seven of that perpetual diadem
Which doth not fail by night, nor yet by day,
To circle round our heaven the wain-pole's way:
Let him with these include the further two
Which are the horn's mouth of the axle bar
Protruding from that ever-central star
Round which the circling heavens eternal wheel.

Imagine then these splendid stars displayed
In two such crowns as Ariadne made
When cold death crept around her. Let them lie

On the vast blackness of an emptied sky,
Crown within crown contained, and let them spin,
The one without following the one within,
And he shall have in vision that I relate,
The dazzle of lights, the dancing duplicate,
Of which ourselves were central.

Yet more far
Beyond our use those heavenly dances are
Than would Chiana's swamp-impeded stream
Beside the eternal revolutions seem.
And so they sang, beyond our mortal wit,
Not Bacchus' praise, but far exceeding it,
Or Poean of triumph, the high unity
Of Three that are in One, and One in Three;
And how in Christ our mortal nature knew
The different unity of One in Two.

The song, and with the song the dance, were done,
And where they paused those holy Lights as one
Turned their regards in new felicity
Toward us; change with them could no way be
Disturbance of their absolute harmony.
And then that Light who had instructed me
Of him whose admirable life displayed
The poverty God approves, resumed discourse:

"Now that one sheaf is threshed, and storage made
Of its good seed, constrained by love's sweet force,
I thresh the second for thy gain. Within
Thy breast is that from which the rib was rent
Which all men seek to kiss, and all repent
The greed of those dear lips that doled them sin;
And there is that moreover into which
The lance was thrust which by its entrance gave
Full recompense for all iniquity
Past or to come; and all you are or have,
All that in Adam or in Christ became,
Was by the Ultimate Worth impregnated,
Which gave to each of these a human name.

And thinking this you wonder that I said
No other mortal to such wisdom rose
As the fifth light that now our circle knows.

"Yet heed, and you shall hear how these things be,
And look with open eyes, and you shall see
The very centre of the target struck.

"For all that dies, and all that doth not die,
Are but reflected splendour. The Most High
His own Idea through loving doth beget
Upon the material universe. That Light
Which issueth from its Source Divine, and yet
Remains unsevered therefrom, and equally
Unsevered from that Love which maketh Three,
Doth by the strength of Its benignity
Form the nine heavens, eternal, infinite,
As light refracted from its outward glow;
And through creative acts descendeth so
To those of mere contingent brevity,
Seed-born or seedless, not of one content,
For various on the wax the die's descent
Imprinteth, heavy or light, and variously
The rich bough hangs, or stand a fruitless tree;
And each man differs in his own degree
From all his fellows.

"Were the wax exact,
And the High Virtue in Its primal act
Of one supremacy, the signet sign
Were always equal, perfect and divine.
But Nature through its myriad faults reveals
Such craft as half displays and half conceals
That which divine imagination planned
As might an artist with a trembling hand.

"Yet should the Vision Divine, the Primal Power,
Select the flawless wax, the flawless hour,
Then by warm Love were Nature perfected.

"Thus one time was mere earth made fit to fruit
In animal perfection absolute,
And then the Virgin was impregnated.

"So my conclusions with your doubt agree.
No man hath ever been and none shall be
To equal Adam or Christ. If here I stay
My course, again your wildered mind will say:
'How then was Solomon without a peer?'
But from your intellect the cloud to clear
Consider at what cause, and who was he,
Who heard the voice say: "Choose," and asked for wit,
And what the use he aimed to make of it.

"For kingly use, he made a king's request
That of all rulers he might rule the best.
To ask that wisdom to his mind be sent
Direct from Heaven by things inconsequent,
Or, at such need, of mere futility,
He did not purpose. Not so foolish he,
Nor yet so arrogant. He did not claim
To know each heavenly hierarch's rank and name;
Nor the logician's subtleties, to prove
Fault of deduction; nor that One must move
Who is Himself unmotioned; nor to try
Abstruser problems of geometry;
But for his boon he asked one excellence,
The wisdom for just rule, the prudent sense
Which so few kings possess, and all require.

"Such wisdom was his prayer; not all entire,
Which was the portion of our primal sire;
Nor that, unbounded, of our First Delight.

"So be this thought as lead, the feet to stay
From hasting to conclusion, yes, or nay,
Which doth not pause the separate cause to weigh.
Fool, and low down amongst all fools, is he
Who with too great impetuosity,
Concludes without examinations guide,

And, having chosen, through conceit and pride,
Maintains a false position. Foiled the more
Is he, than one who hath not left the shore,
Who fishes for the fact, and lacks the skill
To land it. Such in older time were these:
Meliso, Brisso, and Parmenides.
And those who stumbled with no certain will
No certain way behind them. Foolish thus
Were both Sabellius and Arius,
And others of their like whose wayward thoughts
Turned scriptural truth as polished steel distorts,
Making grotesque the seemly countenance.

"Men should not judge too swiftly, nor essay
Belief too lightly confident, as they
Who reap the harvest while the crops advance
To the green ear as yet unfilled. Hast seen
How when the winter thorn forgets its green
Harsh and malignant is the front it shows?
Yet to the summer winds it flaunts the rose.
Hast seen a ship her long lone transit steer,
Secure, fair-winded from the gentle south,
Swift and direct until her port is near,
Hopeless to founder at the harbour-mouth?

"Let not the ignorant crowd too soon declare,
Seeing one steal, and one oblation yield,
That here is hell, or God's salvation there.
Be slow to judge the event, for after all
Who fell may rise renewed, who rose may fall;
Heaven's final purpose may be long concealed."

Canto XIV.

Outward from centre to circumference
May the still water in a bowl vibrate,
Or inward to the centre, as we smite
Without it or within. This thought was mine
The transit of discourse to illustrate,
As Thomas' glorious spirit ceased, and she

Beatrice, in her turn to speak for me
Was gracious.

"In this man a need," she said,
"Is yet unspoken, nor his thought hath made
Discovery to you or himself, to track
Another problem to its root. Reveal,
I pray thee, if those lights which now conceal
Your incorporeal spirits will remain
Around you when you resurrected gain
New visible bodies; and how, if that shall be,
So robed, you either shall be seen or see?"

As, when the festive dance will faster wheel,
And those who are and own its motions feel
The sword-play of desire in thrust and draw,
And louder-voiced and gladder-miened therefor
By their own acts augment their ecstasy,
So did those holy circles pulse and stir,
Hearing that eager heavenly voice of her,
To livelier joyance and more heavenly song.

Whoso laments that we to death belong
Knows not the nature of the eternal rain
That life refreshes to new heights of bliss.
The One, the Two, the Three, Who constant reign
In Three, in Two, in One, to all contain,
Not circumscribed but circumscribing all,
Three times by each, and in such melody,
Were hymned, that none could earn such worth but this
Were fuller payment than his claim might call.

Then did that kingly light most luminous
Within the smaller circle answer thus,
In such low voice as scarce the silence broke,
As when the Angel unto Mary spoke:
"So long as Paradise holds festival,
Waiting the resurrection hour, we shall,
To our love's measure, separately bring
This light about us for our garmenting.

As is our ardour shall its brightness be,
And as its brightness is our grace to see
Far out and high, by Heaven's benign decree.

"But when new bodies, glorious, sanctified,
Are ours, within these globes they shall not hide,
Nor shall they lose them. The new flesh will be
Dowered with continual light its God to see,
Being at last complete and excellent.
That light the vision will of God augment,
And that the ardour, and from that the ray
Will brighten everlastingly. For so,
As through the fire a flaming coal will glow
Accomplishing its visibility
Even through the flames which garb it, so shall we,
In reassertion of the flesh that lay
So long corrupt - that lieth thus today -
Being for its ultimate purpose perfected,
Rule in the light around us, which shall be
Frustrate of all frustration."

Answered then
From the two circles such a swift *Amen*,
And one so eager in its tone, I knew,
Even in that bliss, they thirsted to renew
Their mortal bodies, not perhaps alone
For physical joys, but that again were known
Parents, and those most dear, in days before
They thus were clothed in Sempiternal flame.

Then, as they cried, a further brilliance came,
Faint at the first, as comes at evenfall
Change in the sky, and then, uncertainty,
Expected glories, which we think we see,
But doubt our vision till the night is all.

As though a dim horizon gradual glowed
Around its full circumference, there showed
An outer, larger circle. O Divine
Spiritual Breath! These human eyes of mine

Sank baffled. Then Beatrice showed to me
Herself, in loveliness that memory
Remembers only that it may not be
In earthly memory held. Such strength she gave
I raised again mine eyes that light to brave,
And in that moment I became aware
No longer with those circling souls we were;
But with my Lady alone, the planet Mars,
That is the reddest star of all the stars,
And now seemed redder than I erst beheld,
I reached, and more exalted heights. Thereat
With all my heart I made burnt sacrifice
Of praises in the tongue that all men know.
And scarce that prayer had worded birth before
I knew it to be received in Heaven, for lo!
Such splendours opened to my sight, and so
My sight sustained them, that aloud I cried:
"Oh, God, Who in these rays art glorified!"

As, stretched from pole to pole, the Milky Way
Gleams through its studded stars, till even they,
The greatest sages, in confusion say
Its depths of light have meaning dubious,
So on the ruddy shield of Mars I saw
The venerable sign of Christian war
Set with innumerable stars, but white
With offering of its own exceeding light,
Which flashed assertion of Christ in sort wherefor
I lack device of earthly metaphor,
So that as memory turns, regarding it,
Such memory doth outreach my human wit.
But whoso for himself that Cross will bear,
And in his season shall behold it there,
May yet excuse me all I leave unsaid.

From arm to arm, from crest to base, thereon
There moved innumerable specks of light,
As the cool darkness men in daylight make
May be transthrust by one invading ray,
Wherein the motes unnumbered whirl and play.

So in continual interchange did they
Motelike their interlacing dances break
And join and alter. Crossing swift or slow,
From short to long, the specks unnumbered go.
And as sweet music turned to harmony
Of many cords of viol or harp may chime
Sweetly to one who doth not understand
The notes they render, so a strain sublime
Entranced me from those myriad notes, although
I could not follow their triumphant hymn.

Yet something of the glorious strain I knew,
For ever came the theme its accents through:
Arise and vanquish! Not these heights divine
Had brought me yet to such exceeding bliss
As now enchanted. Do I seem in this
To deprecate the joy that most was mine
Gazing on those fair eyes that gave me rest?
Do I exalt too loud inferior bliss?
No; for as yet I had not seen the best.

He whom my words confuse may think on this:
The lovelier draping gives more loveliness
To that which is most lovely. (I accuse
To make mine excusation). When I say
This bliss was greatest on mine upward way
I do not in those words contrast the sheen
Of dear sweet eyes I had not wholly seen,
And which, with each ascent from sin's alloy,
Shone with more beauty, and with holier joy.

Canto XV.

That love which the divine, benignant Will
Doth like sweet perfume through all space distil
(As will malign distils cupidity)
Silenced the music of the mighty lyre
Which the right hand of Heaven had struck to fire,
Fingering the strings of its high harmony.
How shall the prayer of human righteousness

Beat a closed gate, if these high beings agreed
Such silence merely to subserve my need?

Well may interminable grief be his
Who doth for love of mutable things digress,
And thus himself divest eternally
Of such high love as here was shown to me.
How for unlimited loss should grief be less?
For endless dole should lamentation end?
For hell's offence to cease would all offend.

As down the tranquil night's unclouded sky
A light may dart and draw the following eye,
As though some star its station changed (yet not
Leaving a vacant place among the stars,
Nor where it goes itself establishing),
So from its place upon that cross there shot
A star toward me, yet which did not leave
The cross's foot, but, gem to, scarf, thereon
Like glowing fire in alabaster shone.

Only my Master give comparison,
Telling of how Anchises found his son
In the Elysian fields, such tenderness
Was in the voice I heard: "Oh, grace divine
That thee baptizeth! Oh, descendent mine!
To whom was ever twice, as unto thee,
Heaven's gate unclosed?"

Such words attention drew;
Yet at my lady here I looked, and knew
A double wonder, for so bright her eyes
That here it seemed I saw profundity
Both of my grace and of my Paradise.

And then, that sight and hearing both were rapt,
The spirit's voice continued. What he said
At first I knew not. Not that he designed
To speak beyond me, but my mind, inapt
To grasp the eternal, faltered to construe

Thoughts that our mortal target overshot.
But when the bow of ardent love declined
To strike my level, these the words I knew:
"Be thine my blessings, Sacred Trinity,
Who to my seed hast shown such courtesy!"
And then: "A long-felt hunger, deep and dear,
Drawn from that sacred page which none may blot,
Had brought thee hither, and thou feedest here,
Bathed in this plenitude of light divine
From which I greet thee. That loved guide of thine
Well mayst thou thank, who gave thee wings to rise
Above the common bound of earthly skies.

"Thou deemest that to me thy thought hath way
Speechless, as from the monad rightly ray
The pentad and the hexad. Hence thy tongue
Enquires not why, these festive throngs among,
I seem most jubilant, or whom I be.
So, truly, it is. In this lucidity
We all, the greatest to the least, can see
Thy mirrored thought before it shapes in thee.
But, that love's dictates be the more obeyed,
And my foreseeing watch the more repaid,
Raise thou thy voice in Heaven, serene, secure,
Undaunted to demand decreed reply."

I met Beatrice's eyes, and they to me
Gave signal of assent, and amorously
I answered: "Equal from the glorious hour
Of thine ascension must have been in thee
Affection and perception, for the Sun
Which warms you and enlightens hath Its power
Of heat and brightness poised so equally
That in our human speech all simile
Must fail to reach it. But mortality,
For reasons which to you I need not say,
Spreads poorer wings, and less adept to soar,
Having emotion or perception more
Feathered for flight, or less. And therefore I,
Being mortal still, and having here no less

Infirmity of that unequalness,
With my heart only give thee glad reply.

"But further I entreat thee, as I may,
Live topaz that thou art, who dost begem
This sacred emblem of Christ's conquering,
That thou appease me with thine earthly name."

"Oh, leaf who from my root ancestral came,"
He answered, "thou for whose appearance here
I watched, delighting in this hour foreseen,
I give thee answer glad. Four mortal lives
Divide thee from me. He from whom derives
Thy house's name was honoured son to me.
Around the Mount a hundred years hath he
Trode the first Terrace. Very meet it is
That thy good works make sacrifice for his
Continued torment, and reduce.

"Oh, far
Fair vision of Florence that my mind contains!
Oh, bartered chastity for meaner gains!
Oh, sober peace of that walled girth where still
Tierce and nones from the same belfry sound!
Fair necks were there which no rich necklets wound:
Fair heads no flaunting coronets that wore.
No dames so girdled that their zones were more
To memory than themselves. No daughter's birth
Distressed the father, who with sharp dismay
Forethought of dowry, and the wasteful day,
Unmeasured in its prodigality,
Of riotous nuptials; wedding and dowry's worth
Were held in reason's bounds, nor this too soon,
Nor that too monstrous in amount. There stood
No mansions empty while their owners went
Exiled because their deeds were excellent.
No chambers yet where Sardanapalus
Luxurious ruled. Not Montemalo then
Less than Uccellatoio was contemned.
(The more the height the more the fall shall be.)

Bellincion Berti have I seen to go
Belted with leather and bone, and soberly
His dame her mirror leave with paintless face.
Of Nerlo he, and he of Vecchio,
Oft have I seen in leather jerkin clad,
And naught above it, while their dames would sit
At flax and spindle.

"Happier days they had
Who did not doubt in their own land to die;
Who did not fear in lonely beds to lie
For France's calling of their lords; who bent
Above the cradle, soothing words to say
In that love-language parents please; who drew
Threads from the distaff while they told anew
Tales of the Trojan wars, and Filsole,
And Roman triumphs. Della Tosa then,
Or Salterello, had a marvel been
Such as Cornelia would be counted now
Or! Cincinnatus. To such life serene,
So gravely ordered, so desirable,
So stablished in its civic faith, so fair
In sweetness of its domesticity,
I passed the portal of life by Mary's grace,
In bitterness of birth-pangs called, my name
Was Cacciaguida. Your old Baptistry
So, with the boon of Christianity,
Confirmed it. Brothers of my blood were they,
Moronto and Eliseo. There came
From Pado's valley she I wed, from whom
Thy name derives. I served so valiantly
The Emperor Conrad in his wars, that he
The grace of knighthood gave. I marched with him
Against that power which holds the sacred tomb,
Our heritage, captive, to the infamy
Of those whose spiritual rule neglects
So great a purpose. In that land I fell;
Martyred by the iniquitous infidel
From the false world where hosts in bondage lie,
Not favoured by such fair release as I."

Canto XM.

Oh, paltry honour-boast of human blood!
I will not marvel more that here below
Amid degraded passions, men should show
Pride in so poor a claim. For surely I,
Though loftier stationed in that purer sky,
Where is no baseness of desire, was stirred
To pleasure as that high descent I heard.

Yet may we price too high a failing dower,
A shrinking mantle of renown. Behold,
Time with his shears goes round it, hour by hour!

With that imperial *ye* which first was heard
In Rome's high courts, but now is least the word
That city uses, I began; whereat
Beatrice, standing some short space away,
Smiled in a manner which recalled to me
How coughed that lady who was first to hear
The fond imprudences of Guinevere.

"Ye are my father, ye exalt me so
Beyond my level, that bold heart I know
To question my desire; from streams so wide,
So various, is my kindled mind supplied
That were it sent thereby to overflow
Its natural bounds, by simple joy's excess,
I could not marvel.

"Dear progenitor,
Tell me, I pray thee, of thine ancestry,
And in your boyhood what events prevailed
Around you in the sheep fold of St. John,
Our mutual city; how it then was hailed;
What were its loftiest seats; and who thereon
Most worthily sate."

A living coal will glow
More brightly as the winds about it blow.

So did that topaz by my words caressed.
And as it brightened, in sweet voice and low,
In the old dialect of his time, he said:
"From that fair day which *Ave* heard, to when
My mother, sainted now, my burden cast,
Made this strong star its revolution red
Five hundred times and eighty, to renew
Its fervour where the lion is overhead
My fathers and myself in childhood knew
That street where they the yearly race who run
Reach the last Sesto. Of their periods past,
Of whom my fathers were, and whence they came,
Silence is seemlier than more to say.
But in our city in my youthful day
From bound to bound, from Mars upon the bridge
To the north wall where lies the baptistry,
There was but one man fit the sword to bear
For five now living. But what men they were!
The humblest craftsmen to the noblest line,
Each had the pure blood of the Florentine,
Not then debased from Campi's peasantry,
Nor from Certaldo, nor from Figghine.
Better by far had these as neighbours dwelt
Beside you but apart; Galluzzo still,
And Trespiano still your boundaries,
Rather than that Aguglion's hind should stench
Your streets, or he of Signa, equally
Rooting for some base chance of barratry,

"Had that high priesthood now degenerate
Been as a mother to her child benign,
Rather than Caesar's stepmother, why then,
One who is now a bartering Florentine
Had been to Simifonti sent, the where
His grandfather was once a mendicant.

"Then Montemurlo in the Contis' care
Would still remain; and still in Acone
The Cerchi dwell; and still perchance would be
In Valdigrieve, by good augury,

The Buondelmonti. All our City's woes
Spring from the mingling of its blood with those
Who crowded inward, as men gorge until
Excess of feeding brings the body's ill.

"A blind bull stumbleth to its fall, the while
A blind lamb moves uninjured. Oft we see
One sword is deadlier than five would be.
Luni regard and Urbisaglia,
High walls now ruined! Sinigaglia
Goes the same downward way: Chiusi too.
It does not seem a doubtful word or new
That noble households should themselves undo,
Since even cities like men's lives decay.

"All edifice, endeavour, enterprise,
That lifts in hope, in time's long darkness lies
A fallen loss; although its sure regress
May pass unnoted if men's lives be less.

"And as the moonled tides forevermore
Flood and lay bare, lay bare and flood, the shore,
So over Florence move the tides of time,
Ruining, exalting, base or else sublime;
So where the wonder, if the names I say
Of noble houses are no more today
High boast's occasion? I have seen decay
The Ughi; even the Catallini fall;
The Greci glory, and the Filippi,
The Alberichi, and the Ormani
Their ancient greatness lose. As proved as they,
What name hath he of Arca now? What name
He of Sannella? What of place or fame
Soldanieri or Ardinghi now,
Or the Bostichi holds?

"Above the gate
Which now the Cherchi with such evil weight
As may to wreckage steer the barque of state,
The Ravignani dwelt. Count Guy can claim

Descent from them, and who hath since assumed
Himself the high Bellincione's name.

"The Della Pressa then the art of rule
Had practised. Stablished in his mansion, gilt
Already was Galigaio's dagger's hilt.

"Already regnant were the arms of Vair,
And those Saachetti and Barucci bear;
Fifanti and Giuochi ruled as now;
And Galli; and that house who blush with shame
For the false measure, at a bushel's name.

"Already rooted was that stock from which
Branched the Calfucci; and in curule place
Sizii and Arrigucci. Oh, what pride
Have I seen its own fortune override
To opposite ruin! While the golden balls
Wore Florence in her haughty festivals,
Their fathers, fattening on the vacant see,
Fed grossly in the seized consistory.

"Already rose the monstrous tribe of those
Who are as dragons to their weaker foes,
But lambs to such as teeth will bare, or use
The purse's argument. From such base stock
They came that little pleasure was the word
To Ubertin Donato when he heard
Berti a bride would from his daughters give,
So that himself became their relative.

"Already Caponsacco from the rock
Of Fiesole had sought the market-place.
Already Infangato's name was high
For civic virtue, and Giuda's nigh
Of equal honour. This which next I tell
Is truth, though it be near incredible.
The ancient gate which in its time alone
Gave access to the city's central zone
Was from the Della Pera named. All they

Who that great baron's arms are bold to bear
Who still is honoured on St. Thomas' day
Do well to vaunt the worth of whose decrees
Stablished their knightships and their dignities;
Though he who those proud arms in gold contains
Is now the champion of the people's claims.

"Already were the Importuni known,
And the Gualterotti's worth was shown
Though still was Borgo held a quiet spot,
Neighbour'd by those so new it knew them not.

"The house from which your desolation came,
Buondelmonte! Through resentment just
That cut so short your joyous youth, was held
Even then in honour, and its potent name
Was it's adherents' covering shield. How ill
For thee, for all, thy failure to fulfil
Thy plighted nuptials! Light of heart had been
So many who are sunk in sadness now,
Had God's discerning mercy caused thee find
The Ema the first time you rode the bridge.
Yet was it seemly that the deed of woe
Which closed our city's peace was wrought below
The mutilated stone of Mars.

"But I
Saw Florence with these noble folk I named,
And others kindred, in sure peace, untorn
By faction, with no dark corruption shamed,
No cause for lamentation, not forlorn
For vengeful murders: saw its people just
And glorious. Not was then the lily on
Her crest by fractious arrogance reversed;
Nor its white ground become vermilion."

Canto XVII.

As when Phaeton came to Clymena
To end his doubting - he whose fatal zest

Still makes a father to a son's request
Slow-yielding - such was I, as both could see
Beatrice, and the holy shining star
Which from its glorious height had sunk so far
To greet me. Wherefore said she: "Loose the heat
Of yearning from thy lips, as in thy mind
It forms. It is not that thy thoughts defeat
Our swift perception; but that thou shalt find
The words that shape it."

"Oh, dear soil, "I said,
"Wherein my roots strike downward! Thou, so far
Exalted that, as simple problems are
Of angles to the earthly mind, so thou,
To whom all place is here, all time is now,
Canst see the coming of contingency.
Even before the unborn event may be,
Thou hast the sight to tell me! When I went
With Virgil through those pits where shades lament,
And round the Mount of Healing, everywhere
I met with warnings of great woes, to bear
My last days downward. Not my fortitude
Would prove unequal were these evils viewed
In a clear light approaching. Less the plight
Of him who sees the arrows nearing flight."

Thus spoke I, as Beatrice willed, to him,
That topas-light, whom never cloud should dim
Again from the eternal clarity.
And from unclouded vision answered he,
Not as, before the lamb of God was slain,
Dark words hid Wisdom where men searched in vain,
But in precise particularity
That love ancestral answered, with a smile
Concealing and revealing: "Left and right
A scene extends, beyond the bounded sight
One sees within the mirror. So to me
Stretches the long-dead past's immensity,
And so the future in clear sight extends.
Not therefore must you call contingency

Predestined more than is the ship that lends
Its moving shadow to the stream.

"Therefrom,
As cometh to the ear soft harmony
An organ utters, cometh sight to me
Of that thy later days will meet. As once
Phaedra from Athens drove Hippolytus
With spiteful perfidy, such falsehood thus
Will cut thee off from Florence. So today
He wills, he plots, he will not long delay
To act, who pondereth in that place where Christ
Is sold without cessation. First the shame
Must fall, as always, on the offended name,
But vengeance later shall the truth assert
Which arms and drives it. All you own and know
Most loved to lose as from your home you go
Shall be the first keen shaft of exile's bow.
To taste the saltness of the stranger's bread,
The hardness of the stranger's stairs to tread,
Shall vex thee next; but more thy shame shall be
In that malign and vicious company
With which thou art consorted. Ingrates all
They shall contemn thee, they revile, but yet
It is their eyes, not thine, at last shall fall;
It is their cheeks shall redden. They shall be
Self-demonstrators of their infamy,
So that thy fame shall be more surely set
Who hast for party but thyself.

"At first,
In that great Lombard who the bird of God
Bears on the ladder, shalt thine exile find
Host and protector; to thyself inclined
In such affinity that between you two
All which are most men loth to ask or do
Shall readiest prove. Attending at his court,
One shalt thou meet so young that small report
His deeds have earned, although his warlike star
So ruled his birth that it shall lead him far

In notable deeds. Nine only times as yet
Its revolution in the eternal wheel
Hath watched his growth. But ere the Gascon guile
The noble Henry hath befooled, the seal
Of valour which he bears in deeds shall smile,
That toils shall disregard, and gold forget.
And with the years his deeds magnificent
Shall brighten to a sun beyond conceal,
So that its warmth his very foes shall feel,
And thank it. Watch his acts beneficent.
Poor men shall prosper and the haughty fall
Through him. I tell thee things thou shalt not write,
For no man would receive it." (Here he told
Incredible things I yet in silence hold,
Which those who see them shall not quite believe.)
"My son, these words the warnings heard before
Interpret truly, baring to thy sight
The snares which in short time thy steps shall grieve.
Yet be not envious of the orgulous state
Of those who overset thee. Thou shalt see
The appropriate wages of their perfidy
Before thy life's conclusion."

When no more
He spoke, but by his glowing silence showed
That, through the warp my hands outheld, his woof
Had ceased its weaving, I in turn began,
As one who lacks clear sight his course to plan
May plead to one who loves, and hath the will
And the good wit to counsel; "Well the proof
I hear of that I dimly learned before.
And well the buffet of fate's lance I see
That spurreth on me with such certainty
A none may miss. Yet worst such impacts fall
On those the least who face them. If I lose
All else I love, the greater need is mine
To arm myself with foresight, that I choose
One path I need not for that hate resign:
The path of glorious song.

"In that sad pit
Where wailing lasts for ever: on the Mount
From whose bright summit by my lady's eyes
I was exalted to these realms to rise:
And after, through this Heaven, from light to light,
Much learned I which, should I on earth recite,
Would be to numerous ears a bitter blend;
But if to truth I prove a timorous friend
My song may lack strong wings its course to keep
Above the waters of oblivion's deep,
To reach the ears of those, long years away,
To whom our time will seem a distant day."

The light in which my dear discovery,
Was clothed and manifest, coruscated now,
As when the sunlight counters dazzlingly
A golden mirror. "Those," he said, "who bow
Shamed heads for recollection of their own,
Or others' evil shall esteem thy song
An utterance harsh, but not for that shalt thou
Put truth aside, but in its name alone
Tell the whole vision alike of right and wrong,
Fearless of all, and stript of every lie;
And those who itch therefor may scratch the scab.

"For though thy words at first offend the tongue
With bitter flavour, yet digestion's test
Shall find them vital. Therefore sound thy cry
As winds that most upon the mountains high
Their strength exert. For this to arm thee best,
Only the souls of known or famous men
Have met thee, either in the depths of Hell,
Or round the Mount, or of the Blest who dwell
In these revolving wheels. For those thy song
Will reach hereafter would not heed events
Obscure, of those reversed in human strife,
Wholly neglected from the mouths of men.
For who will fix his faith, or shape his life
From paltry incidents or arguments?"

Canto XVIII.

That mirror of light yet in himself rejoiced
For that which to my gain his wisdom voiced,
And I yet turned it in a mind that fed
On that which proved both sweet and bitter bread,
When my dear Guide, who ever Godward led,
Charged me to change my thought. "Recall, " she said,
"That I who lead thee am to Him most dear
Who every burden casts."

I turned to hear
My consolation, and those sacred eyes
Such love revealed that not in anywise
Can that I saw be told. Not only so
Because my mortal speech is winged too low
Such heights of love to reach, but memory
Fails at its side, the heavenly guidance gone
That made me fit for the celestial air.
But this I know, that while that glory shone
I could not long or fear, I could not be,
Except as she controlled me. For the peace
Of Heaven illumed her, and reflectingly
Shone from her face on mine.

Her smiling eyes
Held me in that dear trance and then release
Alike compelled. "Behold, thy Paradise,"
She said, "belongs not in mine eyes alone;
Turn thee, and heed again."

I looked thereon
Once more upon that flaming light, which shone
Its purpose further to discourse. It said:
"In this fifth circle of the Eternal Tree
Of which no fruit shall fail, no leaf be shed,
Which from its summit with full life is fed,
Are spirits which before to Heaven they came
Were of such eminence of earthly fame
As must the more exalt the loftiest song.

Gaze therefore on the Cross's horns, and see
How each, successive, as I speak his name,
Will flash along it, as the lightning's flame
Shows on the cloud."

There flashed a light along
The Cross, with which the name of Joshua
Came at one instant both to think and see;
And at the high name of the Maccabee
Another lightened, wheeling as a top
Which gladness lashes that it may not stop.

After Orlando came, and Charlemagne,
And each I followed as the eager eye
Regards across the heaven its falcon fly,
William, Rinaldo, each a following flame,
And Robert Guiscard, and Duke Godfrey came;
And numerous other lights that intershot
The glowing surface his high artistry
Chose as the worthiest ones to show to me;
Until I turned to my right side to learn
What duty might require, as word or sign
Beatrice gave, and thus her eyes I met
With joyance lit so clear and so divine
That all their previous beauty, first or late,
Could no way this high moment emulate.
And as men find delight in doing well,
And by the increase of that bliss can tell
That virtue makes advance, so there I saw
The heavenly arc in which we moved increase
Its vast magnificence of circling peace.
And by that sign our instant transit through
The space that reached a loftier realm I knew.
And as a girl's shame-reddened cheek we see.
Reverting to its cooler ivory,
So, for the red glow of the warrior star,
I saw the intense white light of Jupiter,
And in that torch the golden sparkings stir
So that in human words their motions are.

For as a flight of birds, that fields conceal
The while they feed, together rise and wheel
In ordered flight, now long, and now compact,
Above their pasture, proving in the act
Their joy of life in where and what they be,
So move those singing souls continually
Trailing to forms of L or I or D,
Chanting the words their letters shape, and then
Pausing awhile in static ecstasy.

O Goddess of the sweet Pegasean spring!
Who giveth genius the will to sing,
And with the will doth those who serve thee dower
With visions of high devise, and words of power,
By which their songs continue, and through them
May give a more enduring diadem
To cities and realms than memory else would bear,
Inform me with thyself, that I may share
This benediction. Grant me words that glow
With the high vision I saw; the power to throw
In bold relief through these poor lines the scene
That I would show to those who have not seen!

The wide white star with golden words was spread.
Thirty and five the letters there I read,
One after one, until the final M
They reached, and paused thereat. *Diligite
Justitiam* I read, and at the end:
Qui judicatis terram. On the peak
Of the last M, I saw more spirits alight
Giving the birdlike form a birdlike beak,
And singing, as I thought, the eternal right
By which all good draws Godward. There, as rise
Uncountable sparks when burning brands are smit,
Whereat the credulous stare with foolish eyes,
Drawing vain auguries therefrom, there rose
A thousand glorious sparks that there alit,
Some high, some low, as their controlling Sun
Devised it, till the patterned form entire
Was eagle, neck and head, in points of fire.

He Who in heaven that splendid sign hath prickt
Had none to teach Him. That He doth depict
Comes of Himself; as from Himself derives
The love on earth that every nest contrives.
And as I gazed on God's clear sign, I viewed
The other sparks of that beatitude
Which as with flowers the M had garlanded,
Now in more definite form their numbers spread,
So that the body and the wings became
Clear as the beak.

○ star of temperate flame!
What glorious symbol of what magnitude
Thy disc extended! By what diadem
I saw the truth in heaven thou dost engem,
That justice is divine. And hence I pray
That He Whose infinite mind did first decree
That sign, its motion and its potency,
Saw the foul smoke which doth devitalise
The ray divine; that His just wrath arise,
As once before, against the bartering
Which doth defile this temple - one not made
Of earthly stone, but blood of martyrs spilt
And miracles of God its walls have built,
Which now are shameful in their furnishing.

Oh, Heaven's warriors whom I contemplate!
For those poor sheep who move on earth astray,
Misled by pastoral example, pray!

Wars once with swords were made: by trickery
They make them now: to excommunicate
And then reopen to a golden fee.
Their coin that holy bread which God alone
Shall rule; Who will not deal his child a stone.

But thou whose hand will close the Church's gate
To make thy gain in opening - dost forget
That Paul and Peter, who the vineyard made

Which thou hast trampled for thy loathly trade,
Though for its gain they died, are regnant yet?
But thou mayst answer: "My desire is set
Alone on him whose solitary life
Went stumbling on to martyrdom; and so
Paul or the fisherman I do not know."

Canto XIX.

Gigantic in its size, with wings outspread,
That bird of God, which many souls composed,
I watched rejoice in its high harvesting.
Each of its myriad spirits ruby-red
The white star-surface in its brilliance rosed.

But that to which I now must testify
No voice hath told till now, no song did sing,
No ink indited, nor high fantasy
Fabled aforetime. This I heard and saw.
That golden beak against all natural law
Spoke *I* and *Mine*, which yet was plain to see
Multiple, whose true words were *Our* and *We*.

It said: "Because I justly ruled and well,
By service given, I here exalted dwell,
In glory absolute itself to quell
From envious longing; while on earth I leave
Such memory, even whom their subjects grieve
Revere me, though they will not emulate."

So from those duteous souls one voice arose
As many coals a single ardour glows,
To which I answered: "O perpetual flowers
Of the eternal ecstasy, who make
Your odours single! Will your justice slake
Desire which long hath held me hungering,
For which on earth there is no food to bring?"

"Well know I that God's justice must appear
Mirrored in every heaven correct and clear,

But yet unmirrored its own self is here.
You know I listen with what eagerness,
You know the doubt that need no words express,
You know the unsated hunger felt so long."

As when the falcon from the hood set free
Claps its glad wings, and turns a preening head
Its plumes to sleek, that myriad entity
Woven of praises of the Will Divine,
Stirred to an outburst of triumphant song.

Then: "He whose compass masked the earth, "it said,
"And stretched its limits, and within that bound
So much made manifest, so much profound
Left beyond search, could not so hard impress
His worth upon the Universe, that less
Of virtue His remained. It left excess
Infinite and incomprehensible.
This may be seen from that first being superb
Who would not his impatient longing curb
To wait for light, by which defect he fell.
For each created being must abate
His longing to contain the increate
Infinite Wisdom; which Itself can school
To measurement by no inferior rule
Beneath Its excellence. From this we see,
The vision of finite man, which needs must be
One single light-ray from the Source of Light,
Cannot itself include the infinite,
But yet must from its Godborn nature reach
For deeper wisdom that its wit can teach.

"Reflect, how deep can any mortal eye
Pierce downward through the ocean's mystery?
How much of ocean can one eye-glance see?
It sees the shallow bottom by the shore,
But venturing outward to more depth, the more
Its sight is baffled. Yet the depth is there.

"There is no light for any soul to share

Except from that unrippled Source serene.
Besides is darkness, or the shadowy screen
Of flesh, or its corruption. Here is seen
Enough to show thee that thou canst not see.
The living justice which is hid from thee
Is there, and absolute. But thou didst say:
'A man upon the bank of Indus dwells.
How can he know of Christ whom no one tells?
He hears no speech, nor any word is writ,
Which he might welcome if he heard of it.
His words are blameless, and his thoughts are clean,
His actions, as by human reason seen,
Are sinless. Unbaptised and unconfest,
Faithless he dies. What justice may contest
For condemnation? What his fault to hold
No faith in that of which he was not told?

"You ask. But ask again. What right have you
To judge so far beyond a human view?
Your sight a span, you yet presume to say:
'That thing is wrong a thousand miles away.'
Truly, if here no Scripture ruled, were found
To human argument a marvellous ground
For long debate and subtle questioning.
But oh, gross minds! Oh, beasts terrestrial!
Men went from God, the while the Primal Will
Changed not, nor from itself did deviate.
No separate good itself is increate,
But all its virtue from one source derives,
Being freely downward rayed on earth. But yet
That which is given can involve no debt."

As, when the stork its hungry brood hath fed,
It riseth on wide pinions overhead,
Circling above the nest, and those therein
Looking upward, watching what is God to them,
So did that eagle, as it ended, rise,
Broad wings of counsels multiple to spread
And so did I look upward. Song it made
Beyond my comprehension. Then it said:

"As sounds my paeon to a mortal ear,
So the eternal Verdicts must appear
To those the flesh yet trammels."

Then it closed
Those wings that won the world to reverence Rome,
Which now the Holy Spirit so richly rosed
With flaming lives innumerable. Once more
It spake: "No spirit to this sanctity
Hath risen who was not of Christ's chivalry.
None but through faith in Him, neither before
Nor since He died upon the impious tree.
But many in the Christian lands today
Who call on Christ, shall stand more space away
At the last judgement than shall those who scant
Had thought of Him, through being ignorant.

"When the two crowds shall be disparted there,
For gain of glorious life, or else despair,
The Ethiopians shall not bear the shame,
But those who know and soiled the Christian name.
The heathen Persians shall your kings contemn
When the book opens that recordeth them.
Then shall they hear the deeds of Albert - he
Who soon shall Prague's fair land make desolate:
And he who to the Seine brings misery,
Debasing coinage, till he find his fate,
Torn by the boar's red tusk: and that fierce pride
Of Scots and English, discontent to bide
In their own lands: and that effeminate
And lust-degraded life of him of Spain:
And the like record of Bohemia's king,
Who virtue neither worked nor willed: and he
The Cripple of Jerusalem, whose gain
Of righteousness shall prove a weight too vain,
His evil deeds a thousand times as large:
And all the avarice and the villainy
Of him who hath the Isle of Fire in charge
Where once Anchises died, whose paltriness
A crabbed and stunted style would best express,

Giving small space to one whose deeds were less:
And, plain to all, the deeds exposed shall be
Of those related kings who wrought in wise
Their race and two fair crowns to bastardise:
And they of Norway and of Portugal,
And he of Rascia, whose deeds abuse
Venetian coinage, shown for what they are.
Oh, well for Hungary, if she refuse
More laceration from contending kings!
Or that the mountain barrier of Navarre
Maintain her from the woe such entering brings!
They have the example of Nicosia
And Famagosta, who lament and wail
The trampling of the beast who doth not fail
To be as ruthless as his kinsmen are."

Canto XX.

When from our hemisphere the western sun
Descends, and all the day's glad light is done,
It is not darkness that succeeds, but far
Shine out reflected glories, star by star.
This glorious image to my mind was brought
As the great bird, which was the standard wrought
For the world's empire and its leader's praise,
Closed its glad beak; for then each separate light
That formed it, each than any star more bright,
Burst into songs which then I heard; but now
Default of memory will not more allow
Of recollection. Glowing rose of love!
This only can I tell, which once above
I heard so sweetly, and so bounteous saw:
Music they were, but not as notes that blew,
But rather thoughts of God, the flute-holes through.

And after, when those lucid stones and dear,
Which the sixth heaven engemmed, had ceased to chime,
I seemed the murmuring of the stream to hear
Such as from rock to rock descendeth clear,
Fed from a generous source abundantly.

And as the sound within the lute proceeds,
Or the wind enters through the hollowed reeds,
So did anticipation end. As though
That eagle's neck were hollow, mounting so
The sound became a voice my heart was glad
To hear: and on my heart its words were writ:
"That part in me which in the mortal bird
Sees and defies the sun's high light," I heard,
"Must now be looked on, for the gems of it
Are the most choice of all the stones ashine
Which by their union make this form of mine.

"He who the midmost of their glory glows
As in the eye the central pupil shows,
Was once the singer by God's Spirit inspired,
Who led the Ark, whose glad release he choired,
From city unto city. Now he knows
How pleasing was that song to God, by this,
The place of his rewarding.

"Of the five
Whose separate gems the eyebrow's arch contrive,
He who is nearest to the beak is he
Who to the widow consolation gave
In justice for her son. He knows how dear
The price to those who walk from Christ astray
By the sweet life God's justice grants him here,
And by the opposite of his earlier day.

"The next is he who won his death's delay
By penitent prayer. He knoweth surely now
That though tomorrows by a worthy prayer
Were gained which not in God's first purpose were,
The eternal justice untransmuted stood.

"The next in order of the arch is he
Who, with good meaning, evil fruit that bore,
Left to God's Pastor on the Tiber's shore
The rule he held, the Grecian throne to fill.
He knoweth now that that tremendous ill

Condemns him not who could it not foretry,
Though the whole world to ruin fall thereby.

"And he thou seest as the arch declines
Is William, whom his kingdom mourns - but more
That Charles and Frederick live their sighs deplore.
Now knoweth he how high doth justice bring
The place and honour of a righteous king.

"But who would credit, at an earthly guess,
The Trojan Ripheus is the fifth? No less
He knoweth now that this high eminence
He won by the celestial grace, that clear,
Beyond a mortal's sight, he probeth here;
Though even he to find its depth is blind."

As for a while the soaring lark will sing,
And then be silent in its height, as though
Content the sweetness of its song to know,
Stilled by the pleasure of remembering,
So seemed the silence of that bird divine
Which all who long therefor may gain to reach;
And though transparent in my questioning
As glass through which interior blazons shine,
Yet could I not my further words contain,
But asked abruptly: "How may such things be
As thus you tell me?"

Then immediately
The blessed ensign, with a livening eye,
Relieved me from suspense of marvelling:

"I see that you believe the notes I sing
Because I sing them; but you see not why
These wonders are, so that, though credited,
They fail of revelation. Thus thou art
As he who knows a thing by name and sight,
But does not, till another tells aright,
Its meaning or its purpose comprehend.

"*Regnum coelorum* breaks its gates apart
Before the assault of violence. Hope alive
And love's fierce heat their conquering course contrive,
To outrage on the Heavenly Will. Not so
As man will overbear a mortal foe,
But that surrender is Its choice - to be
Frustrated by its own benignity.

"Two gems - the first and fifth - thy mind confound
That they have gained the grace of heavenly ground,
Supposing that they died in heathenry.
But this they did not. In the faith they died.
The one's clear sight foresaw Christ crucified;
The other owned Him in His later day.

"For one, through prayer's compelling might, which pled
From lips most potent at the Eternal Throne,
Came backward from the very porch of Hell
(Where none can rightly will, while there they dwell
To mortal bones resume, that he might so
Accept the Saviour he had learnt to know;
And with belief love waked, a flame intense,
That, as their second death his members felt,
Translated him to this glad eminence.

"The other, through that grace which upward wells
From springs so deep no mortal eyes can see
Even the first wave of its profundity,
Set all his heart on righteousness, until,
Being led from grace to grace, God gave him sight
Beyond the shadows of his heathen night,
So that the dawn of our redemption showed
Its light thrown backward on his miry road.

"Believing that high vision, the pagan creed
He cast aside, and raised his voice to plead
Against it with the heathen folk preverse.
Those damsels whom at the right wheel you saw
Were his three sponsors at the font - the law
Of baptism yet a thousand years away.

Predestination! In what bogs they fall
Who think they understand, yet see not all.
Oh, mortals, straitly from your judgements stay!

We who see God by Heaven's diviner ray
Know not that yet the whole elect we see.
And even this defect is dear, because
One law of God is over all His laws,
That what He willeth we alike must will."

So by this Bird of Heaven my mind was taught
To find contentment that it came so short
Of ultimate vision. As a singer's touch
The harpstrings wakens, adding more to much,
So likewise, as it spake, mine eyes had seen
Those two blest gems it named in sudden sheen
Of rapture, as two eyelids wink, assent.

Canto XXI.

Again mine eyes for my dear guidance went
To her on whom alone I now relied,
And with mine eyes my mind on her alone
Was centred wholly. But no smile replied.
"Were I to smile," with serious eyes she said,
"It were not to your gain, for you would be
To ashes turned thereby, as Semele
Died from too great a splendour.

"You have seen
My beauty kindled as, with straight assent,
The higher heaven we gain, and were it now
Untempered to you from a gracious brow,
Scorched would you shrink therefrom, as men may see
The lightning turn the summer greenery
To smoking ash.

"Now have we soared to test
The seventh splendour, which beneath the breast
Of glowing Leo shows its separate star.

Look outward now, and where your glances are
Be your mind also. Mirrored in your eyes
Be all this heavenly mirror's height supplies."

Who of the wealthy pasture that my sight
Now entered knoweth, he can gauge aright,
Weighing the one side and the other side,
How fair I bartered when my heavenly guide
Mine eyes abandoned at her own command.

"In that great crystal which doth bear the name
Of the earth's ruler through that golden age
When every evil left the temperate land,
I saw a ladder. To so great a height
It rose that not my eager straining sight
Could follow, coloured like reflected gold;
And on its steps were splendours manifold,
Ascending and descending. Countless they,
Numerous as though upon those golden bars
The emptied depth of heaven had poured its stars.
As jackdaws, when the day begins to break,
Lift their chilled wings, and rise in flocks that make
Straight outward, or a wheeling course prefer,
So seemed that sparkling host, that made its flight
In groups which on their chosen steps would light.

Then one, the nighest of all, became so bright
That in my thought, as though aloud, I said:
"The love thou signest me I do perceive;
But she to whom in this strange realm I cleave,
And on whose counsel I depend for speech
Or else for silence, pauses. Therefore I
Do well my inclination to deny,
Which else would question."

She, who understood
The thought unspoken, answered. "Loose," she said,
"Thy keen desire." But I, in that release,
Made audible petition: "Naught in me
Is worthy thy regard. My only plea

Is the permission of this holiest one.
But for her sake this grace who granteth, say,
O Blissful life! In thy felicity
Concealed as in a garment of light, why thou
Dost come so near me, and this speech allow?
What influence to this part appointed thee?
And tell, I pray thee, why the realms below
Were loud with quiring voices, while you glow
Paradise of silence?"

"Mortal ears,"

He answered, "as a mortal's sight you bring
To heavenly regions. We have ceased awhile
For the same cause Beatrice did not smile.

"I settled here upon the lowliest rung
To make thee jocund with a mortal tongue,
And blissful with the light that mantles me.
It is not greater love that service gave,
For kindred fervour burns, to serve or save,
In those above us, to the most degree.

"So much their lights may tell thee, gloriously
Flashing their message of pure love. But that
Which makes us all alike most diligent
To serve that counsel which the earth controls
Selection of me made, and hither sent."

"I well believe," I answered, "how the souls
In this high court are impulsed to obey
The eternal purpose; but I see not why
You, of the sacred concourse, more than they,
Were for this deed to me predestinate."

I had not ended when that Sacred Light
Spun on itself, as with high thoughts elate,
Like to a millstone whirling rapidly.
Then from the midst its core of love replied:
"The light divine did downward concentrate,
Piercing the substance which embowels me,

So that I rose above myself to see
The Essential Source of all. But not that sight,
Nor aught made visible in its fount of light,
Gave me the answer which you seek. That soul
In Highest Heaven the most illuminate,
The Seraph who on God most ardently
Doth gaze forever, not his eyes could see
Your satisfaction. In the most abyss
Of increate light its sacred answer lies
Beyond the searching of created eyes.

"To know why that is that, or this is this,
Would bare the enigma of Reality
No mortal thought can guess. Take this report
Back to the world from which you came, that it
Presume not to pursue so great a goal.

"What are vain men to those in glory here?
Yet not to us the Eternal Thought is clear.
Shall their smoke-blinded eyes avail to see
This first immeasurable mystery?"

Informed by this repulse, I reined desire
To seemlier measure, humbly to enquire
To whom I spoke.

He answered: "Near the land
Your fathers owned, the Italian mountains rise,
Between the one sea and the other sea
Mid-distant, to such heights the thunders sound
In valleys far beneath. One peak there is,
Catria, below whose sheltering bulk there lies
A hermitage, in which so ardently
I sought God's service that no use I found,
Come heat come cold, for aught but frugal fare.

"Good fruit to Heaven came from the cloister there
In days long ended, From its branches bare
There is not any crop to garner now,
Nor verdure to conceal its barrenness.

There Damian's Peter was I called, or else
Peter the Sinner. For a year and more
I sojourned on the Adriatic shore,
Within the cloister of Our Lady. Few
My years remaining when the call I knew
To take that hat which, as the years go by,
Passes from worse to worse recipient.

"Barefoot and lean both Paul and Cephas went,
Taking their food from any hostelry;
But modern prelates to such girth are grown
That when they journey one must move ahead
And one must hoist them upward from behind.
And as their robes about their palfreys spread
(Oh, patience which so long its time doth bide!)
Two beasts are covered by a single hide."

As thus he spoke those other flames, that shone
Upon the higher steps, began to whirl
And brighten, and descend from rung to rung.
And every motion that they made thereon
Enhanced their beauty.

Grouping round him now
A cry unto the heights of heaven they sent.
One deep articulate thunder upward went,
Beyond comparison of earth. I heard:
But, to my human hearing, naught it meant.

Canto XXII.

Distressed to stupor by that thundering cry,
I turned to my dear Comforter, as turns
A frightened child toward a parent nigh;
And as a mother, when its need she learns,
Is swift to succour, and her voice subdues
Its hurried breathing, giving confidence,
So spake she to me: "Doth your mind refuse
To know you are in Heaven? Nor argue thence
That all is holy here, and naught offence?"

If lightly thus your sober sense you lose,
Think what had been if I had smiled, or they
Sung the high song that lauds their heavenly day,
Your mind disordered by a single cry!

"For, in that cry you lacked the wit to hear,
The vengeance you shall see before you die
Thundered aloft through Heaven its meaning clear.

"The sword of wrath, which smites and sundereth,
Will haste or hinder not to deal its death,
Though those whose wrong it vengeth think it slow,
And those who fear its dreadful edge to know
Think it too instant in its fall.

"But see
What other spirits wait illustrious,
Their earthly habitations to discuss
To your contentment. Guide thine eyes by me,
And these shall greet thee."

I obediently
Followed her glance, and saw a hundred spheres
Grouping themselves around us, mutually
By their exchanging rays more beautiful.

Before the lucent spheres abashed I stood,
As one who feels the urgency of desire
But for presumption lacks temerity.
Whereat the greatest and most luminous
Came forward to content me. From within,
This answer reached me: "Love's assertive fire,
Beyond thy comprehending, burns in us.
This hadst thou understood thou hadst not feared
To speak thy thought. But lest thou still be slow,
I will expose thy silent need, and show
Its answer to thee ere itself be said.

"That mount which on its slope Cassino bears
Was once with pagan temples summited,

Where worshipped folk malign and folk misled.
I strove with those who did the Name deny
Of Him whose lowliness doth lift so high
The heads of those who own Him. Here such grace
Was granted that I cleaned that pagan place,
Routing the obscene cult's seducing power.

"These other fires were all contemplatives,
Lit from that sacred source of flame which gives
Its grace of holy fruit from holy flower.
Here is Maccarius: Romoaldus here:
Here mine are brethren who the cloister kept
Beside me. In its narrow space they slept;
Nor did they wander in their thoughts away."

And I to him: "The condescending love
You show my weakness by conversing thus,
And in those fires a guise propitious,
Tempts me to further stretch my confidence,
As the rose opens to the light above
Till every petal hath its utmost spread.
I ask thee, therefore, have I grace to see,
Bare of the hiding flame, the mystery
Which is thyself, though uncorporeal?"

"Brother " he answered me, "thy high request
Is not refused; nor is it granted now.
But when the ultimate bliss you rise to see
Is no desire but shall be granted thee
As there we also find accomplishment.
For there, entire, mature, and perfected,
Each aspiration forms its faultless flower.

"There is no past, nor any days to be,
Nor space is there, nor earth's polarity;
And as this ladder to such end aspires,
It follows that its end you may not see.

"So Jacob saw it rising endlessly,
Laden with angels. Whose the foot that tires

Lifted from earthly paths to mount it now?
Even my Order hath no lasting use
But waste of parchments; and its house of prayer
A brothel; and the hoods its brethren wear
Are sacks of meal corrupt and maggotted.

"But not so utterly the usurer's trade
Doth God displeasure as the harvest made
By greed monastic. That the Church receives
In pious offering is the equal right
Of all who truly at its altars pray;
Not for the priest who for his kindred thieves,
Or one who makes more bestial claim than they.

"The mortal flesh is so seducable
That good commencement is no warranty
That the young oak will goodly acorns bear.
Peter began his sacred ministry
With neither gold nor silver; I with prayer
And abstinence; and with humility
Saint Francis. If in turn you each regard,
The starting forth, the after-path astray,
You see the clear white turned a dingier grey.
Yet to fling Jordan back may seem more hard,
More wondrous to divide the deeper sea,
Than from such evils would God's rescue be."

At this he ceased, and those around him drew
Closer, and then, as though a whirlwind blew,
They all swept upward; and my lady dear
Impelled me to the same ascent. A sign
Was all she gave, but that sufficient cause
Moved me as never yet by Nature's laws
Men rose or fell. Believe that flight of mine
Was over ere a hand which feels the flame
Could be snatched backward. In that space I came
To reach the high sign of the Heavenly wheel
Which follows Taurus. O most glorious stars!
Impregnated with virtues luminous!
All that I am, or have of genius,

Or much or little, from your lights derives.
With you was rising, and with you would set,
That ardent heart which sires all mortal lives
When first I breathed the air of Tuscany
And then, when largesse was bestowed on me
To enter the high sphere in which you wheel,
I found your region mine. Oh, give me now,
Devoutly I entreat thee, equal power
To the hard passage that I take!

"So near,"

Beatrice spake, "the ultimate blessedness,
That you should seek approach with eyesight clear
And most awareness of the glories here;
And therefore, ere to more ascent we go,
I charge thee to look backward. Look below;
And see how wide a realm, and how complete,
Already have I placed beneath your feet.
For then the exultance of your heart will be
Of equal mood to meet Christ's chivalry
Triumphant in its height celestial,
When through the ether on your sight it breaks."

Then looked I downward through the seven spheres.
How mean, how paltry our proud earth appears
Seen from that height! I needs must smile to see
Its meagre aspect. O sound choice that takes
Its value at the least! How truly they
Are upright called who raise their eyes away.

I saw Latona's daughter, shining now
Without those shadows which to earth she turns,
Making me doubtful of her density;
Sustained the aspect of Hyperion's son;
And saw the daughter fair of Dione,
And Maia's son, in his vicinity
Their courses take; I saw Jove's temperate fire
Between his hot son and his chillier sire;
Observed their various orbits; all I learned,
Their size, their swiftness, and the distant vast

That parts them on their paths. And far below
The map of Earth was spread: the hills I know:
The winding rivers. All that threshing floor
For which we strive so hard, to lose at last.
So from the Eternal Twins my glance I cast
On all we had passed to that far height attain,
And turned it to her beauteous eyes again.

Canto XXIII.

Like bird at night among her leaves apart,
Brooding her nest, who feels beneath her heart
Her offspring stir, and with wide eyes and keen
Looks eastward lest the first faint sign be seen
Of dawn, while yet the dark contains from sight
The young she waits to see, her day's delight,
The bough she longs to leave, their food to bear,
(Dear, constant toil), so seemed, my Lady there
Gazed upward, rapt, erect, intent, and I
Felt as one feels who longs, he knows not why,
For that he know not.

All my deep content,
Since to my heavenward path her hand she lent,
Passed from me; yet brief space was mine to draw
Desire's short breaths, till in midheaven I saw
A first faint light grow golden. Flower on flower
Broke sheath in heaven to form that noonlight hour.

"Lo," said she, pointing to the brightening sky,
"The squadrons of the rule of Christ draw nigh.
Himself He cometh. On his returning way
Triumph those who held His path a darker day."
And while she spake, as never words shall tell,
The brightness of that light around her fell.

Then seemed, as in clear depths of cloudless sky,
At midnight, when the rounded moon is high,
Smiles Trivia, and the eternal nymphs supply
The entire great heavens with light. For while I gazed

Toward that curtain of pure light - amazed,
Beat down, and blinded with the sight - I knew
All souls that once on earth to Christ were true
Were round Him. In uncounted hosts they came,
And formless each, one clear translucent flame.
For each soul was not, in its Master's sight,
Substantial seeming, but reflected light,
And He the Substance. Drawn across mine eyes,
A curtain were they of most living skies,
Through which I saw Him. Yet that light intense
Blinded, and as I bent, and turned me thence,
- O, Beatrice, gentle guide and dear! -
Her voice gave comfort: "That which foils thee here
Is virtue only. Naught at last conceals
Against it; here the Power of God reveals,
And here the Wisdom. Here the last New Birth
Is shown, in which Christ triumphs. For all the earth
That yearned for Heaven, and all the Heaven that bent
Toward it, separate by the gulf of sin,
Love bridges at last, and you behold herein
The bridal joys of their so long desire.
You see the path God's suffering paved with fire,
And Christ comes down it."

As the blackening cloud
Leans down, and in its breast the lightnings crowd,
Beyond endure, and burst in thunders free,
And none can trace them where or what they be
Thence after, so my mind, of things too great
Cumbered, gave way. It is not to relate
I lack words only. That I felt I saw
My mind refused. Again her voice. She said:
"Behold, and see me only, while I see
The banquet of the Lord of Heaven. In me
Reflected, tolerate light thine eyes may know.

I fared thereat as one whose mind doth go
Back to the threshold of a dream forgot,
And beats upon the doors, and enters not,
And may not enter, though that memory breed

Intolerable desire, and aching need.
No roadstead for a homing barque was here:
No helm for helmsman's hand who spares to steer
In dreadful, marvellous ways. But who shall weigh
The ponderous theme my feeble shoulders stay,
He shall not blame, that trembling steps and weak
Support it, stumbling to the goal I seek.

For asked she: "Wherefore are thine eyes on me
So fondly fixed, they will not lift to see
The garden in the light of Christ that grows,
And fragrant from the heart of Love's own Rose -
The Rose that from his opened veins is red,
The lilies of His life, whose odours led
The pavours that this roadway built?" And I,
As though my mistress' voice could strength supply,
Made strife against my feebler sight, and lo!
As when pure sunshine lights the bended bow
The tempest bears, or when, more like, appears
Great sunlight through a broken cloud, its spears
Shattering the gloom, and those the storm surrounds
See not the sun, but see, beyond their bounds,
A field of flowers sunlighted. So to me
Shone splendours from a place I might not see,
Shone splendours in a space I might not share,
And yet could know them. All my heart in prayer
Went upward. O, divine and kindly Power!
The name of that most fair and single flower,
The flower that morn and eve I call by name,
Bound all my mind to face that greater flame.
And as that star that earth and Heaven at one
Most laud, in glorious light before me shone,
Down from midheaven, through all its splendours, came
Separate intense, a tiny orb of flame,
That when it reached her, ringed her round complete,
A crown of light, pulsating. Song most sweet
Were discords of the storm, to that great lyre
That sounded, as their Queen was throned in fire.
O, sapphire, that the brightest heavens contain,
Central! O, song that hymns thy, deathless reign!

Clear through the breathless, waiting hosts, it said:
"I am the Angelic love. The light that led
The waiting world to God. The Uncreate Fire.
Who sheltered in her womb the World's Desire
I compass ever, height on height to tread.
O Lady, follow where thy Christ hath led!
The highest, holiest, inmost sphere shall be
Diviner, flowering all its hope in thee."

The song was ceased. The circling lights around
Returned her praise in silence sweet as sound.
And like a child its mother's breast hath fed,
Sated, that while it sinks its sleeping head,
Reaches toward her, as she rose, I saw
Those lights, constrained by Love's exceeding law,
Reach upward, lengthening, and the chant of praise,
Regina caelis rose. Not all my days
The song goes from me. Oh, what wealth was here!
Oh, gold of all our seeking, bought too dear,
Bought with one sin! Shall any weight of woe,
Labours for Christ we take, or joys forgo,
Count in this scale? Oh, great reward we see,
High gladness for good tilth and husbandry,
Abundant treasures for the tears that fell.
Are Babylon's weeping days so deep a hell?
Is Babylon's fading gold so great a lure?
Do any exiled woes so long endure?

Here, here, where Mary reigns with God's High Son,
Here is the threshold of our bliss begun.
The Eternal Gates, before the sacred Key,
Swing wide, and Death dies out in Victory.

Canto XXIV

"O fellowship of Heaven's elect, designed
In this great Sacrament your food to find,
Given by the Lamb of God, Whose grace hath willed
That in this food are all desires fulfilled,
As by God's grace this man hath risen so far

Without the lifting of the mortal bar,
Grant that his hungered lips some crumb may taste
From the mere falling of your table's waste.
Be his strong yearning his credential here.
Let some dew fall upon him from the shower
Of which you drink so freely."

So she said;
And each glad spirit became a radiant sphere,
Spinning on its pole, and glowing golden-red.
Bright comets they seemed, so far their effluence flamed.
As moving wheels in clockwork harmony
Appear, the first to pause, the last to fly,
So did their dancing carol whirl, and so
Express the measures of their ecstasy.

One sphere there was who greatest beauty claimed
Beyond description in our words. He thrice
Circled Beatrice with so sweet a song
I could not hold it in my fantasy.
My pen, avoiding failure, leaps along
To possible telling. How could words create
That which, though heard, is indiscriminate
To mortal memory now? A colouring
Too violent must the earthly artist bring
To paint the intricate folds of cloth divine.

Pausing, it said: "Oh, holy sister mine,
Thy prayer, by glowing love impregnated,
Doth loose me from the circling sphere."

And she:
"Oh light intense of that apostle to whom
Our Lord, before he faced and burst the tomb,
Trusted the keys of this exultant joy,
Which he to earth had taken! Test this man
On points of doctrine either light or grave
Of that high faith by which the liquid wave
Was once made solid to thy feet. You see
What sort his love, his hope, his faith may be.

Thou hast the vision which no darkness hides;
But since no citizen in this realm abides
Except he entered by true faith, it well
Becomes this man the sacred truth to tell,
And it, and our redemption, glorify."

Even as the bachelor his mind arrays,
But does not speak before the master's voice
Propounds the subject which he made his choice,
And opens it without determining,
So while she spake, with range of reason I
Prepared the faith I held to testify
To this august examiner.

He said:
"Good Christian, tell me, what is faith?"

And I
Looked to Beatrice for support; but she
An eager indication gave to me
That I should hasten in my own reply.

Thereat I answered: "May the grace whereby
There comes this high occasion to confess
To him who warward led the Christian van,
Equip my mind with wisdom, to express
The faith I hold."

So humbly, I began;
And thus continued: "As thy brother dear,
He who with thee to found the Church was sent
By Rome's conversion, with veracious pen
Wrote down for our instruction, faith must be
The substance of things hoped, the argument
Of things invisible to mortal men.
These words I take to be its quiddity."

"You answer rightly, if you rightly see
The meaning of the words, and wherefore he
First called it substance, and then argument."

And I again: "The wonders bared to me
The range of mortal eyesight doth prevent
From those below. By faith alone they see.
Thereon is hope erected. Verily
Faith is the sub-stance of that hope. And so
By faith, if faith we have, we syllogise
In sight's default. Of things unseen, he meant,
It is by faith we build our argument."
Then heard I: "If all voices loud below
Expounded teaching thus, no false surmise
Should truth confound, nor gibe of sophistry."

So spake that incandescent love, and then:
"The coin is of true weight, and right alloy,
But test we further if thy purse employ
That which thou canst so well describe."

And I

"It is so bright, so round, the coin I bear,
That of its imprint is no line unsure."

"How gained you this dear jewel which doth bring
All virtue and all worth durably?"

"I gained it from the parchments, Old and New,
Made fragrant from the sweet sufficient dew
The Holy Spirit poured thereon. They brought
Conviction so intense, so clear, that aught
Of demonstration seemed obtuse thereby."

Then heard I: "Wherefore didst thou count divine
Those parchments Old and New, whose words combine
To such conclusion? "

"By the fruits they bore.
Nature no iron did ever heat, nor smote
On anvil to construct such verities."

"Yet why believe assertions so remote

From all experience of mankind? Didst note
The scripts alone themselves to verify?"

"If, "I replied, "through naught miraculous
The world were turned to Christ, its turning thus
Would be a hundred times more miracle
Than aught recorded in those scripts. For thou
Didst open that strange warfare, not as now
In glorious garb of light, but meanly clad,
Not ignorant of hunger. Thus was sown
That goodly vine which now a thorn hath grown."

As thus I said, there rose so great a cry
Triumphant through that holy court and high,
Deus laudamus, that the spheres below
Vibrated to its ecstasy. And he,
That Leader, who to trace the sacred tree
From branch to branch had drawn me, till remained
Only the outmost leaves, resumed: "You show
That Love Divine hath with thy mind conferred
To give thee wisdom, and a truthful word
Thy lips have uttered. But you have not said
What is this faith you hold, nor whence you gained
To hold it."

"Holy Father, who dost see
Now in communion close that verity
Which when on earth thou surely didst assume,
So that thy feet were swifter to the tomb
Than those more youthful, thou wouldst have me say
The confident creed I hold, and tell the way
I came to find it; and I answer thus:
One God is my belief, eternal, sole,
By Whom this heaven, an everlasting whole,
Is impelled with all love and all desire,
The while Himself remains unmoved, entire,
Separate. For this belief do reasons call
Both physical and metaphysical;
But the same truth I learned from Moses' lore,
And through the Prophets and Psalms. And furthermore

I learned it from the Gospels; and through you
Who wrote that which the ardent Spirit inspired.

"In the Three Persons I believe, eterne,
Of but one Essence and one Entity;
To whom both are and is, both one and three,
May be applied alike and equally.

"This is the faith I hold, profound, divine,
First learned from teachings evangelical,
Born like a spark, but like a star to shine,
A star in heaven which now transcendeth all."

"Then, as I ceased, the apostolic light,
As one whose servant makes report aright,
Three times around me circled, and three times
I heard the singing of the sacred chimes
Of benediction. So my faith he tried;
And so he blessed the words I testified.

Canto XXV.

If ever to sad hope the hour should rise
When this I write of Heaven and all between,
Which through long years of toil hath made me lean,
Should be of potency to overset
The bitter verdict which forbids me yet
The sheepfold where I slept, as a lamb lies
Foe to the wolves which are its natural foes,
Then with changed voice and different fleece from those
With which I fled shall I return to wear
The poet's chaplet at the font which there
Once saw my baptism. There the Faith I knew
Which introduces souls to God, wherethrough
I came where Peter now encircled me.

But moved another light from out the sphere
Where grouped the vicars whom Christ bid declare
The tale of His salvation. "Look how near,"
My lady charged me with glad eyes aware,

"He cometh, for whose sake Galicia's shrine
The pilgrims throng in that far world of thine."

As at the mating time an amorous dove
Circles and coos and bows around its love,
So these high captains of our faith I saw
In rapturous greetings join, that praised the feast
Which by the boon of Heaven their joys increast.

These greetings done, they faced me silently,
Yet in such radiance that mine eyes abashed
Sank down before them. But she spoke for me:
"O lustrous life, who told in sacred writ
The largesse of our court, make hope to sound,
I pray thee, in this height. On earthly ground
Thou didst personify the lure of it,
When Jesus on the Mount was glorified."

Then in response that second splendour cried:
"Lift up thy head, and with assurance gaze!
For naught can to the middle earth belong
But it must ripen when it feels our rays."

Thereat I raised mine eyes grown confident
Toward the heights of Heaven, that sank before,
And he continued: "Since our King hath meant
That with His nobles, in His sacred Hall,
Thou shalt confer before thy death befall,
That thou hereafter shalt these sights recall,
And strengthen in thyself and those who heed
The hope that doth all earthly hope exceed,
Say now what this hope is, and how to thee
It flowered, and by what course it came to be."

But she so dear, who with such tenderness
Had nursed my wings for this high flight, my word
Prevented with her own: "There is not one
Of all the militant church on earth more rich
In that high virtue; scrolled upon the Sun
Which guides the armies of God, that truth is clear,

Therefore was he allowed to enter here,
To come from Egypt to Jerusalem,
His years of mortal warfare yet undone.

"But those two further points I leave, that he
May answer, not as aught unknown to thee
Exposing in his words, but that he bear
This record back to earth, and tell to them
Who have the grace to heed it. This will be
Not difficult to him, nor boastfully
Will he have need to answer. May God's grace
Now make him equal to his need."

And I,

So heartened, as an eager pupil will,
In haste by answering to reveal the skill
His Master tests, made confident reply:
"Hope is the sure and fixed expectancy
Of glory waiting in the days to be,
Born of God's grace, and merit precedent.
From many stars hath come this light to me,
But first I learned it from the voice of him
Who sang supremely of the Lord supreme.
For said the Psalmist: 'Let them hope in thee
To whom Thy name is known;' and what could dim
That name to faith like mine? And next I read
The words of thine Epistle. Filled thereby,
Such hope could overflow, and fructify
In weaker hearts than mine."

As this I said,

From out the living centre of that flame,
A flash intense and swift as lightning came,
From which there followed: "That high hope I had
Which flameth still, which naught on earth forbad
Even to the field I left, the palm I won,
Willeth that with thee should my flame be one,
Who in thy warfare hast the same delight;
And further is my wish that thou shouldst show
What promised pleasure in thy hope doth glow."

And I to him: "The scriptures, old and new,
The symbol showed, and from that sign I knew
The essential fact the friends of God declared.
For, as Isaiah said, the robes are shared
By those God blesses in their earthly years,
When to the sweetness of this life they rise.
And in thy brother's vision more appears
The evident truth in clearer exercise,
When in his revelation he declares
The two white robes the saint in glory wears."

I scarce had ended when the loftier height
Rang over us, aloud with Heaven's delight.
Sperent in te the exultant clarions cried,
And all the carols to this shout replied.

Then from among them flashed so strong, so white
A glory, that the world would know no night
In winter days, were such a crystal set
In Cancer, to redeem the low sun's debt.

As some glad virgin, with no thought beside
The joy and honour of her friend the bride,
Steps out and dances, to herself display
In all her beauty, so this splendour came,
Joining the others in their zone, and they
Wheeled in the dance of love's intensest flame.

And as the bride they praise may stand content,
Watchful of all, unmotioned, reticent,
So stood my lady, 'See,' she said, 'the man
Who on the bosom of our Pelican
Once rested; who was chosen from the Cross
Our Lady's comfort in her mortal loss.'

As one who gazes for the sun's eclipse
Till blindness cheats him, so my dazzled sight
Surrendered to the overwhelming light
Of this last glory; but its voice I heard:

"Why art thou dazed by that which is not here?
My body rose not from its earthly bier.
Nor shall it, till the tale of God's elect
Be totalled. In all heaven there are but two
Who the two robes may wear till God renew
Creation from the dust. Take back this word
To those who doubt it."

As he spoke, the rest
Their motions and their singing ceased, as when,
For weariness of toil, or perilous shores,
The whistle shrills above the straining oars.
Then I Beatrice sought, my sight to test,
And could not see her, though she stood to me
So nigh, and in high Heaven's felicity.

Canto XXVI.

As I stood blinded thus, a voice there came
Directed to me from the blissfull flame
My sight that conquered: "Till again you see,
Recovering that you have consumed on me,
The compensation of discourse is thine.
Say therefore on what thoughts thy mind is set;
And doubt not that thy sight is flawless yet.
It is defeated, but it is not dead.
For she who upward to these heights hath led
Hath in her eyes the power that one time lay
In Ananias' hand."

"Let what come may,"
I answered, "in this realm where all is good;
For what God willeth, it is all I would.
And at what time she choose, or soon or late,
Be these eyes opened which were once the gate
Through which she entered with the kindling fire
Of mine unquenched insatiable desire.
The good which gives these lofty heavens content
Is first and final in love's argument;
Of all the scriptures the intent is this,

Either implied or taught with emphasis."

The voice which had my blindness comforted
Urged me again toward discourse. It said:
"You needs must shake a finer sieve than that.
Say why this targe your bow was bended at."

I answered: "Dictates of philosophy,
And old traditions of authority,
Showed me at first the good I loved to see.
For good, being seen, because it is the good,
Wakes love. The more that it be understood
The more it gains by its own excellence;
And therefore will the mind itself direct
Toward that essence which such virtue is
That nothing else of any worth can be,
Except it have its virtue drawn from thence.

"This truth is to my mind interpreted
By him who doth the primal loves detect;
It is interpreted as certainly
By Him Whose voice *ego ostendam* said,
Omne bonum tibi; interpreted
No less by thee, whose writing didst proclaim
The interior secrets of this holy place,
As none besides revealed it."

Then I heard:

"The reason for your love which first you tell,
By intellect and by authority
Confirmed, is primal, and you answer well.
But tell me if no other cords there be
That draw thee Godward: if no other teeth
Which close and drag thee to the love divine?"

Not hidden from me was the high design
Through which Christ's eagle sought my faith to see,
Whereat I answered: "Yea, such grips are mine.
All powers of love that move the heart combine
To hold me in that close captivity.

The existence of the world, the mystery
Of mine own being, and most powerfully
The death He suffered that I should not die,
The hope His followers have to live thereby
(Which hope is mine), these various cords supply
A net to draw me from the darker sea
To the safe shore of right love's verity.
Each leaf of the fair garden God creates
As it with Love the Gardener cultivates,
So must I love it to the like degree."

I scarce had ceased before the sweetest strain
Mine ears had heard through Heaven was sung; and she,
My lady, *Holy, Holy, Holy*, sang,
Joining the acclamations; and thereat,
As when a strong light strikes on slumbering eyes,
So that the spirit within must wake and rise
To meet it as it penetrates, but still
Confused and blinded by the light, until
Adjustment and reflection gain control,
So did Beatrice to mine eyes restore
The sight I squandered, with one glance's ray,
Which had not, though a thousand miles away,
Unequal to that rescue been; and more
Of sight she gave me than I lost before.

And as my vanquished sight returned to me
I saw four glories where had been but three.
And of this wonder, as though stupified,
I dumbly made demand, and she replied:
"Within that splendour, holding converse high
With his own Maker, is the ancestor
Of all mankind."

As, when the wind comes by,
We watch the bending of a downward bough,
So was my soul bowed down in wonder now;
And, as the bough resumes its previous place,
So to that glory did I lift my face
Restored by eagerness to speak: "O thou,

Who wast not seed, but as a fruit mature
Came to the garden of God! To every bride
Father, and father to the spouse she takes,
Be thou complaisant to mine eagerness
Which asks no less because no sound it makes,
Knowing I have no need to thought express
To win thy comprehending, and that less
Than any speed of speech is thought's delay."

As, when a cloth above a beast is spread,
Itself concealing, if it lift its head
The moving cloth its motion indicates,
So that first soul within its glory stirred,
To prove its pleasure at my speechless word.

It breathed: "Though nothing of thy thought was said,
Yet clearer to thy secret thirst I read
Than thou couldst state thy greatest certainty,
Because the truth, as every truth, I see
In that great Mirror which is sight to me,
Which mirrors all, but is not equally
Mirrored by aught beneath it. You would ask
How long the time since God uplifted me
To that fair garde in which, so long a stair
To mount, thy lady did thysel self prepare;
And for how long mine eyes that pleasure knew;
And of my fall the explanation true;
And what the language that I used and made.

"Believe, my son, the bitter price I paid
Was not because I plucked so fair a tree,
But that God's order I contemned thereby,
Four thousand and three hundred years and two
I dwelt in that sad region whence for you
Your lady Virgil sent. Nine hundred year
And thirty, earlier, had I watched the sun
Encircling heaven before my days were done.
Long ere the sons of Nimrod toiled to rear
The tower that should remain unsummitted
The language that I made was lost and dead;

For of all human works will naught endure.
That men will always fashion speech is sure,
And sure that men will change it diversely,
As diverse minds determine.

"Ere I went
To face the grief infernal, That which sent
All good to earth, Which all good radiates
In the high Heaven, was Yah; but after that
El; but such change no change did signify.
For as a leaf will flourish, and then die,
And freshly, as another year goes by,
Another leaf is green, so change is sure
In human use. For human works to dure
That were the only change that will not be.

"On the fair mount of Paradise I stayed,
With life dishonoured and yet purified,
No longer than from sunrise until when
The sixth hour cometh to the world, and then
I mounted, and I here in Heaven abide."

Canto XXVII.

"Glory unto the Father, and the Son,
And to the Holy Spirit." So loud the cry,
So sweet, which through all Paradise rose, that I
Stood as intoxicated by delight.
Not only hearing was possessed: my sight
Alike was ravished. O the rapture there!
The gladness inconceivable! The life
Compact of joyful peace and peaceful joy!
The wealth so absolute beyond compare
No longing can be felt, no jealousy
Were possible sin, if sin were possible.

Glowed the four lights with yet intenser glare
The while they faced me, and I saw that he

With whom I first had converse changed his hue,
As Jupiter and Mars two birds should be,
And change their plumage. That control which gave
Order and function to the blest had stilled
The heavenly choirs, as that red splendour spoke:
"Thou shouldst not marvel that I change my hue,
For these who stand beside will change it too,
Hearing my condemnation. He on earth
Who hath usurped my seat - my sacred seat -
Who hath my seat dishonoured - which is now
In God's sight vacant - he my sepulchre
Hath made a privy whence is drained to hell
The blood and filth obscene which pleases well
The arch apostate from this Heaven who fell."

As intervening clouds at dawn or eve
Redden as they obstruct new day begun,
Or close the path of the retreating sun,
So did I see all heaven a crimson shame
While this was uttered. As a faultless dame
May be confused by some immodesty
She doth not share but is constrained to see,
So did Beatrice's aspect change. I thought:
Such was the eclipse which shamed the Heavenly Court
When on the cross the Prince of Glory died.

But he who spake proceeded, not the tide
Of indignation changing more his due
Than it his voice transmuted: "Christ His bride
Was not established by my blood, or that
Of Linus or of Cletus, that she should
Be used for gathering of ignoble gold.
It was for gain of this fair Heaven that they
Sixtus, Calixtus, Pius, Urban shed
Their blood in deaths that many a tear foretold.

"We had no thought that half Christ's flock should stay
At our right hand, and half be forced astray
To leftward; nor the sacred keys I held
In trust for the Eternal be the flag

Flown over fields of death, where Christians slay
Christians baptised but excommunicate;
Nor that my head upon the seal should be
Of purchased pardons, which mendacity
And greed, in bold defiance of God, create.

"Oft at such deeds doth indignation stir
And redden me as you now behold. They howl
Rapacious through the pastures, pastor-clad.
Rescue of God! Can even God defer
The vengeance that would save us? Cahorsines
And Gascons banquet on our blood. Oh dawn
That looked so fair! We had not thoughts such scenes
Its noon should darken. But my hope remains
That that high Providence which loosed the chains
Of Rome by the good sword of Scipio
Will bring deliverance soon. And thou, my son,
Whose witness on the earth is not yet done,
Be not thou silent among men. To them
Bear witness of these things you hear from me.
For condemnation of what I condemn
You need not fear to utter."

As we see

The frozen vapours in white flakes to fall
When the Sun feels the Goat's extended horn,
So through the ether rose, like flakes of fire,
Those lights triumphant. Not could sight aspire
So high to follow. When my lady saw
Mine eyes absolved of straining: "Look," she said,
"Look downward. See how far thine arc hath sped."

Then downward at her word I looked. From when
I looked before, through the first clime had we
Moved from mid-arc to reach its end. Below
Was Cadiz, and beyond, the shoreless sea
On which Ulysses ventured foolishly.
And on the other hand the distant shore
From which the bull the raped Europa bore.
My sight on earth's extended threshing-floor

Had that way further pierced, except the sun
Had travelled forward, by a Sign and more
Advanced beyond us.

But my subject mind,
(Which gladliest its loveborn food would find
In ever gazing on my lady's eyes,
That all which nature made, or art designed
Of beauty through the sight the mind to win,
All loveliness of flesh, to art akin,
With all that pictures excellence combined,
Were naught to her one smile), from that far sight
Returned my gaze.

The power those eyes possessed
Drew me in swift ascent from Leda's nest
To those most lofty heavens where all is one;
So that I say no more 'was here the sun',
Nor 'here some constellation known to men'.
All in that realm of live intensity
Was like and likeless to my gaze. But then
She saw my longing, and her smile on me
Was as though God within that smile could be,
As thus she answered: "All reality
Round its fixed centre moves; but in this height
Where God is all the love and all the light,
Where is no otherwhere, no where can be.
Love graspeth all in one including zone
Of mystery only to its Maker known.

"What language can define infinity?
Five is the half of ten, but that to see
The limit of the ten must first be seen.
Here is no limit of space; and naught hath been,
Nor will be, ended or commenced. Behold
The roots of Time's full-leaved but fading Tree!
Oh transient greed of earth for transient gold!
Which downward draws the eyes which else were raised
To this fair height where none hath vainly gazed.
Truly the will of men is fair in bud,

But round his roots the filth's continuous flood
Makes the fruit putrid at the ripening hour.

"Innocence and faith are in the opening flower,
But, with the beard's growth, virtues fade away,
And in the loss of childhood lost are they.
How many children fast who, breaking free,
Will eat all meats all months in like degree?
How many to their mothers cling and learn,
Give love for love, who, as the seasons turn,
Will count impatient to her burial day?

Thus is the sun's fair daughter, virgin-white
At dawn, befouled before the fall of night.
And lest thou wonder that the years should bring
From such glad dawn so dark an evening,
Reflect that none bears rule on earth - or they
Lead only who can only lead astray.

"But ere that slight defect of count which brings
The winter months more near to future springs
Shall bloom the January rose, on high
Through this great Heaven shall rise the conquering cry
That peals arrival of the fated hour
When every sail shall spread, and every prow
Swing, as the helm bids, where the poop is now;
And fruit be set from every opening flower."

Canto XXVIII.

When I had heard that truth so contrary
To what we suffer now, or what we see,
From her who to my mind brings Paradise,
Then, as a man may in a mirror view
A taper move behind him, ere his eyes
Have seen it, or his thought have known it there,
And as he then might turn to learn the more
Of what is meant, or who the taper bore,
And see it as the mirror showed, as like
As words to wedded music, so to me

A wonder came that yet I did not see.

For in those eyes which love had made the net
To be my captor, such a spark was set
And when I turned to know its origin,
And on mine own that Glory glanced which all
Who raise true eyes to Heaven behold therein,
A point I saw which not can thought recall,
Nor words be found for that intensity
From which my glance rebuffed and blinded fell.

In the whole heaven there is no star so small
But this keen point of light were smaller far
Than a moon's smallness to that smallest star;
And at such distance as a halo spreads
When mists are densest round its source of light
There spun a circle of fire so furiously
That not the coursing of the swiftest sphere
Could emulate its motion. Circling near
I saw a second outer band of fire
That in its zone enclosed the first entire,
Round that a third, and yet a fourth, and yet
Three more, the seventh of so wide a bound
That were full circle made of Iris' bow
It would not round that outmost circle go.

Yet was an eighth, and yet a ninth beyond,
Each of more moderate speed as its degree
Was further from that core of unity.
Of these, the inmost had the brightest flame,
Because, as I surmised, it closest came
To that most pure and vital spark within.

My lady saw my questioning doubt, and said:
"From that bright point doth all that is begin,
And all concludes. The inmost circle see
How swift it whirls! Love from that pivot inspires
Its furious speed, but the remoter fires
With lessening ardour reaches, that they spin
Outward from zone to zone more moderately."

To which I answered: "That is plain to see,
And such the evident cause. But contrary
Moves the material universe, for there
The outmost circles have the best compare,
And take the swiftest motions. If I knew
Why the reflection doth its source deny,
Then were my reason satisfied; but I
On this angelic miracle of light
Gaze vainly, asking that which mortal sight
Is futile to discover."

"If the knot
Thy fingers fumble, therefore wonder not.
Hard are its strands because no loosening pull
Hath ever touched it till this hour. But heed
The thing I tell thee with attention full,
And on it work thy wit. As more or less
Of virtue hold they is the spaciousness
Of all material spheres. High excellence
High bliss must bear, and must itself express
More amply, being in its constituents
Alike, and differing only in degree.
Therefore the one which more desire contents,
With deepest wisdom and with liveliest love,
Must be that one, the smaller heavens above,
Which all includeth and encircleth all.

"And if thy thought avoid this test of space,
And think of virtue only, then you see
That they are equal in their own degree -
The outmost sphere: the inmost zone of light.

"Greater to more, or smaller into less,
No different are they, equal to express
The grading of the Intelligences, as they
Intensest shine, or pour their virtues wide."

As thus my lady to my doubt replied
In luminous words, my mind became as clear

As, when the winds of earth's wide hemisphere
Blow gently, laugh the skies serene, and show
The beauties of the landscape stretched below.

Clear as a star in heaven the truth she set,
And, as she ceased her words, each coronet
Shot forth innumerable lights, as shoot
Sparks from the bubbling iron; and every one
Danced in its circle at its circle's speed,
Numerous to any mortal count defy,
As we the chessboard's squares may multiply.

From choir to choir those flying notes I heard
Hosanna sound, one sole exultant word
Raised to that point round which they pivoted,
Which bindeth and shall ever bind them there,
The placeless, whereless, but eternal *where*
Which is their place for ever.

Then she said,
Observing mine unspoken eagerness:
"The inmost circles have revealed to thee
The Seraphim and Cerubim. So fast
They spin around that central source that they
Shall share its verity the most they may.
And as their vision is sublime, so far
They gain their purpose.

"Those their course beside,
The loves that round the next swift circle ride,
Are named the Throne, because they brought to be
Completion of the primal ternary.
And you should know that their delightings are
According as their sights can penetrate
The truth which quietens every intellect.
From which we can perceive the blissful state
Is founded on the sight of God direct,
From which love followeth in its course. The sight
Is merit in itself, which grace begets,
And the desire for holiness; and so

From grade to grade doth the sweet process go.

"The second ternary which flowereth thus
In this eternal spring, where never night
Sees Aries trample, doth perpetually
Unite in its hosannas, which it sets
In three accordant strains of melody,
As the three orders of its gladness are.
For here are three ranks of divinity;
Thus ordered - Dominations, Virtues, Powers.

"The third, last ternary consists of these:
First Principalities, Archangels next,
And, last and outmost, Angels flame and sing.
All these gaze upward, being so drawn, and draw
From downward with a might as victoring.

"These are the orders Dionysius saw,
With such keen vision yearning to the height
Of Heaven, that each he named, as now to sight
They spin before thee. Gregory made surmise
That differed, so that when he opened eyes
In this serenity, he smiled to see
His earthly error.

"Marvel not too much
That mortal mind had pierced such mystery.
One, as you read, was snatched to Heaven, and he
Disclosed it, with much else these circles see."

Canto XXIX.

As when in Heaven Latona's children twain
The opposite horizons occupy,
One by the Ram, one by the Scales possessed,
And one must sink from sight, and one must gain
Solitary dominion in the sky,
So long as in a balanced poise they lie
Ere either wholly to one hemisphere
Belong, Beatrice with a silent smile

Observed my longing, gazing fixedly
On that bright point which held infinity.
Whereon she spoke: "I will not ask to hear
The question that thou wouldst, for I have seen,
Even there where all things are and naught hath been
When all things are and therefore naught shall be,
Thy mind's full nakedness, and so to thee
I do not ask, but tell.

"No aim of gain
Unto Himself, which gain could no way be,
Moved the Creator, where eternally
Beyond the intrusion of Time He dwells, beyond
The comprehension of a mortal brain,
To form His creatures; but the will to see
His glory shine in a reflected glow
Which of itself *I am* could testify.

Love was the impulse, that more loves should show
The eternal love that formed them. Do not dream
That once, as slumbering in Himself, He lay.
Creation is an ever-moving stream,
Sourceless and mouthless. Neither start nor stay
Belonged it ever. Matter and form apart
And mingled came, as from a three-stringed bow
Three perfect arrows. As in crystal clear,
Or glass, or amber, will a light enclose
Throughout and instant, so the threefold rays
Instant and absolute and everywhere
Their work accomplished. How could be *before*
Which is of Time, before Time was? Or how
After of Time, if Time should be no more?

"Order with substance one creation shared.
Highest of all pure Actuality;
Lowest was pure Potentiality;
And midmost Power, with Actuality
Inseparably united. Jerome said,
Long ages ere aught else creation knew
The angels only were. But had he read

With clearer eyes what all who search may do
In scriptures by the Spirit of God inspired
He had not blundered thus. And something here
Might reason urge. For why should angels be
Long ages while their functions useless were,
Being formed to serve a world which was not there?

"Now the beginnings to thy mind are clear.
You know the order of the Loves that here
Exult in their swift ecstasy, and so
Three flames of yearning cease as these you know.
Know further that no man should count a score
In so short time as on Creation's shore
A part of these bright angels headlong fell
Beneath the level of Earth. But these remained
In harmony divine, and so began
Their dancing circles, where, being self-enchained
By the excesses of their own delight,
They whirl for ever. He the fall who led
Was lost because his evil pride outran
The eminence God bestowed. For which you saw
How hardly just inexorable law
Had thrust him underneath the whole world's weight.

"But those who revel here were swift to see
The Source from which they came, and modestly
To own and praise It; in response whereto
Their vision clearer, more exalted grew,
As their own merit was by grace replied
With light that by reflection multiplied,
Until they burned God's service to fulfil
By their own separate and established will.
For be not dubious of the fact that they
Who to God's grace their hearts wide open lay
Have merit in that receptivity.

"Now, if your mind have garnered all I say,
By contemplation mightst thou comprehend
Much more of this consistory. But since
Your schoolmen in their lecture-rooms contend

That the angelic nature understands -
Remembers - wills - I will some further light
Contribute to their dubious sophistry.

"These creatures never, since the joyful day
When first they waked to God, have turned their sight
From Him, wherein are all things evident,
Past or to come. Their eyes can never see
A thing unseen before; nor memory
Diverted thence, a previous sight recall,
Always and presently aware of all.

"But earthly men although unsleeping dream,
Talking such things as may or may not seem
Truth to the talker. More the fault and shame
Of those grown subtle in deliberate lies;
But few on one clear path philosophise,
Impulsed by love of notoriety,
And seeking theories which will bring such fame
As schoolmen covet. Yet this mimicry
Of wisdom less of indignation wakes
In Heaven than when the very script divine
Is tortured from its sense, or thrust aside,
By those who think not how its seed was spread
With tears and toil and blood of martyrs shed,
Or how well-pleasing are the steps that tread
Humbly the path long-trodden.

 "Each to shine
In his own light designeth, and contrives
His own inventions, and the pulpits sound
With vain debating, while the evangel lies
Untaught, neglected. One man says the moon
Covered the sun when its Creator died,
Another that the sun its light denied
To all men at that hour the whole world round,
So that the Indian and the Spaniard knew
An equal darkness to the impious Jew.
The Lapos and the Bindos are not more
In Florence streets, than in its pulpits breed

Such worthless fables; and the sheep who need
A fairer pasture on mere wind are fed,
Excuseless that they ask no better bread.

"Christ did not to his first disciples say:
Go forth, and chatter trifles, but He showed
A true foundation, and a heavenly road.
The evangel was their lance on every field,
The evangel ever was their certain shield,
The evangel was their battlecry. But now
They preach with jests and mimic posturing,
And if some jape a gust of laughter bring
The hood blows outward with the wind it makes,
And all is approbation. Could men see
The bird that backward in that cowl abides,
Then might they gauge the brand of pardoning
To which they trust; but such false confidence
Hath grown on earth that any vain pretence
Is taken, proofless of its worth. Thereby
The swine are fattened of St Anthony;
And men, more swinish in their sense than they,
For such false coins as have no imprint pay.

"But since we have digressed sufficiently,
Turn back thine eyes the present scene to see,
So that we journey by the time allowed.
These angels you behold so myriad are
That neither thought nor speech can reach so far
As could their numbers understand or tell;
For that which was revealed by Daniel
Sought no determinate number to express,
But rather that their hosts were numberless.
And as their numbers, so the primal light
On each doth with a different glory smite;
And as doth each its diverse light receive,
So variously it doth itself conceive
The love which it reciprocates thereto.
Behold the infinite Height and Breadth! No two
In all that host identical ardour burn.

Each to one mirrored Love doth love return
Diversely from its own diverted view."

Canto XXX.

As when, with noon six thousand miles way,
Thick darkness on the couch of earth may lie,
But light is visible to the loftier sky,
So that the stars their growing doubt betray,
Until one here, one there, will lose its power
To light our floor, and with the mounting hour,
When the sun's loveliest attendant shows
Above the coming of dawn, the fair light goes
From the mid-depth of heaven, to us profound,
Of one star and another star, until
The brightest takes invisibility,
So did those high triumphant rings of light
Fade in succession from my doubtful sight,
Ceasing from their appearance, one by one,
To include the All-Including, till remained
Naught visible but that point too blinding-bright
For mortal eyes to meet it. Hindered thus,
And by my love compelled, I sought the sun
Which never sets to me. If all before
That I of her have writ were joined to raise
One sweet impassioned melody of praise,
It were not equal. Beauty here was more
Than mortal speech attempteth. Only He
Who made it, surely to the full degree
Could joy in His creation. Here I plead
Defeat in most extremity, to exceed
All past frustrations of the sons of song.

No poet ever of high comedy
Or tragic fall, so far was overcome
By sword thrust of a theme more great than he.
I think of that I saw, and am but dumb.
The intensest sunlight was her smile to me,
As when it falls on eyes least adequate
To face so great a glory. From that day

When first I met her till this hour I tell,
My song hath never ceased nor turned away
From worshipping her beauty. But this height
Hath foiled me. Nevermore my pen will write
The memory of that loveliness. No more
My song will follow on her beauty's track.
All those who seek the highest are beaten back
At last by this default of words. I leave
This theme to a more triumphant trumpet-call
Than mine, which falters as its long attempt
Draws near to its conclusion.

This she said,
With swift and confident words, and gesture sure:
"Behold, from out the Heaven of greatest space
Passed have we to the sphere where light is all;
Light intellectual by pervading Love
Impregnated: pure love of holiness
Impregnated with bliss, which bliss transcends
All separate sweetness. Here your eyes shall see
The twofold chivalry of Paradise;
And those who from an earthly conflict rise
In the same aspect as their forms shall be
Before the throne of judgement."

Suddenly
As lightning blinds, a living light around
So swathed me that no further use I found
For thwarted sight, of that sole light aware.
But hearing had not left me.

All who share
The Heaven which Love to its own quietude
Subdues, doth this baptism of light include
Into Itself, the taper to dispose
To take the flame. As these words came to me,
I felt within myself surmounting power
That conquered all I had been, and therewith
Was sight new-given of such supremacy
That it all brightness might confront, although

Most absolute in essence. There I saw
Light like a river in its molten glow
That golden flowed between two banks aflower
With spring's fresh miracle. From out the stream
Came leaping sparks that in the blossoms fed,
Rubies in cups of sunlight. Each would seem
To sate itself with fragrance, and return
As others outward leaped that joy to learn.

"The more," she said - oh, ever sun to me! -
"The strong desire doth urge and burn in thee
To understand the marvels thou dost see,
The more I pleasure; but I tell no more
Till thou art further fitted to explore
These heavenly wonders. Thou must drink for that;
For all thou canst perceive doth no way be.
The stream itself, the leaping Topaz lights,
The banks, delicious in their first delights,
Are but dim preludes to reality. -
Not that these glories in themselves repel,
But that thy sight is not accustomed well
To this superb occasion."

Never child
By too-long sleeping from its food beguiled
Runs to the milk as then I bent in haste
The marvel of that flowing gold to taste.

O splendour of God! Through which, in Heaven's height,
I saw the triumph of that true realm aright,
Grant me the words a wondrous sight to show!
For as when folk unmask at carnival
Fair faces, when mine eyelids met the flow,
It changed its length to roundness, and for all
The previous beauty of the sparks and flowers,
Lo, the two courts of Heaven were manifest!
But where are words their wonder to declare?
A light transcending every light is there
By which His creatures their Creator see,
Where only in that sight their peace may be.

So large circumference this light doth bind
That, should it test its use, the sun would find
It wore too loose a cincture. All its rays
Strike upward to the Primal Motion, thence
Reflected round and downward.

As a hill

Images itself in some clear lake, as though
Upon its own rich verdancy to gaze,
So in that light, around that eminence,
Round and around in thousand ranks I saw
The conquering saints of God. And if so low,
So large the light, the concourse, nearly viewed,
Judge what must be the outmost amplitude
Of the wide petals of that golden rose.

But not the great breadth nor the ample height
Could give denial to mine eager sight
Of the full sweep of that ranged ecstasy.
For, where God is, nor near nor far can be,
Nor Nature's laws have any meaning there.
Within the yellow of the eternal rose
Beatrice drew me, while its petals spread
Wide open to that sun which round it shed
An everlasting spring, the while its praise
Continual perfume gave. "Behold," she said,
"The mighty concourse to your sight uncloseth
Of all the white-robed victors! See what girth
Our citadel requires! Behold the thrones
So filled that few there are who fight on earth
And have not claimed their places. . . . That which draws
Thine eyes, being vacant, where a crown is set
Above it, waiteth him whose righteous cause
Shall strive to bring relief to Italy,
The imperial Henry, who his seat shall fill,
Before yourself at this high bridal feast
Shall sup among us. Vain that strife shall be,
For, blinded by its rash cupidity,
Your country, like a starving child, doth still

Chase its own hope of life, its nurse, away.
And he who holds the sacred seat shall ply
Friendship at once and secret enmity
Until God thrust him, in short space, to lie
With Simon Magus - forcing lowlier yet
Him of Anagna for his earthly debt."

Canto XXXI.

Like a white rose with open heart to see
Were ranged the ranks of Christ's great chivalry,
Which with His blood, a sacred spouse, He won;
And those angelic birds who, while they fly,
Do sing His glory Whom continually
They serve, and by that service magnify,
Being of it enamoured as they are,
Like swarming bees of which each one doth sink
Within some flower's bright petals, there to drink,
And then fly back to where the toil it bore
Is turned to sweetness in the general store,
Did each for ministry himself embower
Within the petals of that spacious flower;
And then ascend, to that fair realm regain
Where doth the constant fount of love remain.

Their faces were of lively flame: alight
Their wings with lustrous gold: the rest so white
That dull in contrast were the whitest snow.
And as within the flower they ministered
With fanning wings the ranks of saints along,
Passion they gave and peace alike to know;
For in the bliss of that most holy state
Passion is peace, and peace is passionate.

Nor did the multitude that came and fled
Obstruct the vision of the light above,
Nor mar its penetration. Potency
There is not in the universe to stay
That light from those found worthy. All the love
And all the light in this sweet realm are one,

Most joyous in their high security,
Where all of worth to enter, old and new,
Find love and vision are a single word.
O triune light, which in that single star
Doth flash to their content so wondrously,
Look down, the storm that sweeps our world to see!

If the barbarians, from cold lands afar
Which watch the wheeling course of Helice
Yearning for ever in her son's pursuit,
Were stupified by wonder, led to gaze
On Rome's high ramparts, where the Lateran
Towered highest, transcending all the works of man,
Should I not stoop to more extreme amaze
Who here from mortal to immortal came?
From time to face eternity? From those
With whom I mixed in Florence, to consort
With sanity and justice? With this weight
Of wonder and of strangeness bowed, and moved
With joy beyond conceiving, asked I naught
Awhile but silence, thus to contemplate
Confronting marvel.

As the pilgrim stands
Within the temple that he vowed to see,
Gaining new life therefrom, while memory
Already casts its eyes about, to store
For after-telling, so mine eyes I led
Through the live light among those myriad bands,
Now up, now down, and now their lines along.
Faces I saw that dear love lit, made fair
Both by the sacred light around them shed,
And by the smiles that they returned thereto;
And in their attitude mine eyes could view
Honour, and grace, and dignity.

As yet
Attention on no single point had set,
But the whole scope of Paradise had filled
Both eyes and mind; and now I turned to get

The interpretations that I sought, from her
Who had so constantly my craving stilled,
Not doubting aught. But what I thought to see
I saw not. At my side an Elder stood,
Gloriously appalled as those victors are.

With kindly-smiling eyes he looked on me,
As might a father in benignity,
But in quick doubt I queried: "*Where is she?*"
To which he answered: "Here Beatrice willed
My presence, thy desire to culminate.
But look thou to the circle third below
The ultimate honour, and thine eyes shall know
Her merited throne." And making no reply
I raised mine eyes and saw her.

Seated high,
The living everlasting light divine
Crowning her brows with its reflected rays,
I saw her, far from any reach of mine.
Far as from darkness of the deepest sea
The thunders of the utmost heaven may be,
I saw her inaccessible. Not for that
I saw less clearly. Naught could intervene
In that pure space where all alike is seen.

"O Lady," to the distant height I cried,
"In whom my hope is yet unsatisfied -
Who to redeem me, when from grace I fell,
Hast left thy footprints in the halls of hell -
Through whom the bounty and the potency
Of these high regions have been shown to me,
Led by thy virtue in its excellence -
Thou who hast drawn me from where slaves belong
To view the freedom of the sacred throng,
By all the cords thou hast! I pray thee now
Still magnify thy liberality,
So that my soul at death's release may be
Well pleasing to thee."

So I prayed, and she,
Despite the distance, met mine eyes with hers,
Smiling upon me. Then her glance withdrew,
Again that fount of joyous light to view.

Then spoke the holy Elder: "Prayer and love
Assigned thee to me, that thou mightst complete
A perfect progress. Cast thine eyes about
This light-drenched pleasance, gathering power to meet
The extreme brilliance of its source above;
The Queen of Heaven at last thine eyes shalt see.
For her I burn with love, and therefore she
Her grace will grant. Her faithful Bernard I."

As the Croatian pilgrim stands at gaze
While our Veronica is shown, amaze
And reverence for that ancient miracle
Trancing his eyes, while in his thoughts he says;
"My Master, Jesus, very God, was this
Truly thine aspect to the eyes of men?"
Motionless till it be withdrawn, so now
I gazed on him who gained that love to live,
By beauty of a life contemplative.

But his rebuke aroused me. "Son," he said,
"Favoured of Heaven, too long you leave unknown
This joyous region, while its base alone
Your eyes regard. Look up! Look up! to see
The higher circles to the most remote.
The enthroned Queen of Heaven your goal should be,
To whom this realm is subject and devote."

I raised mine eyes. The oriental sky
As dawn approaches, doth indemnify
Its claim to fairness, while the contrary
West is horizoned in a paler light.
So saw I, as along a mountain height
Seen from the vale below, the boundary
Of the top petals of that open rose
Showed at one point superior. As when

The chariot-pole Phaeton could not guide
Is driving upward, near to sight, the glow
Precedes it, while the skies on either side
Are gold less glorious, did that circle show,
Amidst its general oriflamme of peace,
One point of all most radiant, equally
Fading on either hand. And over it
A thousand angels making festival
Hovered and sang and sported; every one
Distinct in art and function, separately
A thought of God created.

Words are none
For what I now beheld. If wealth of speech
Were mine to equal all I dream, I yet
Could no way to that height of memory reach.
Conception will nor compass nor forget
The smallest part of that deliciousness
For which the victor saints of Heaven are glad.

Saint Bernard saw the keen delight I had
To gaze upon the source which filled his joy,
Whereon his own devotion turned his eyes
Back to the same direction, so that I
Mine ardour from his own did fortify.

Canto XXXII.

His love still centred on his most delight,
With holy words that saint contemplative
Became my teacher. "She, so beauteous,
Who ever sits at Mary's feet," he said,
"Is our first parent, who the wound exposed
Which Mary by divine conception closed.
In the third rank are those of next degree,
Rachel beside Beatrice: after these,
Sarah, Rebecca, Judith, and beyond
The Moabite maid who was the ancestress
Of him who sinned and sang, and in the stress
Of penitence *Misereri mei* cried."

Petal by petal, rank by rank, he told
That concourse of illustrious names of old,
Half-circling down the rose's rounded cup,
Until the seventh zone he reached. "From them,
Even as before, go down unnumbered names,
But ancient all, a tale of Hebrew dames
And others who, before Christ's victory,
Looked forward, and believed the light to be.

"For this side of the rose are only they,
But on the other - note the cleft between -
Are those who loved the Christ their eyes had seen,
Or looked with faith upon a backward day.

"Therefore is every petal filled complete
On the one side, but many a vacant seat
Is on the other, waiting those who yet
Shall rise triumphant.

"O'er one side is set
The high seat of the Queen of Heaven alone;
But o'er the other, on an equal throne,
Sits high and sole that John the holiness
Of desert life who dured, and martyrdom;
And who, for his delivering Lord to come,
Waited two years within the gates of Hell.

"Seated beneath him Francis, Benedict,
Augustus see; and how, from row to row,
The conquering Christian saints are ranked below.
Behold the prescience and the high design
Of the forecasting providence divine!
Equal at last the tale of seats shall be
Of those who on a risen Christ relied.
And where the rose is cleft on either side,
Concourse from concourse clearly to divide,
Sit they who come to God unmerited
Either by deeds or faith, their lives too soon
Expiring. Heaven allows this ample boon

On sure conditions. Note the infancy
That still their voices and their faces tell.
Now thou art troubled, and a doubt too hard
Thou wilt not speak! But thou shalt heed me well,
And loose that subtle knot's complexity.

"Within the limits of this perfect garde
Naught may intrude by casualty,
More than may grief or thirst or hunger be
Within its realm for ever. All you see
Is here established by divine decree,
Close-ordered as the finger fits the ring.
Wherefore these folk whom grace to life doth bring
After so short an earthly journeying
Are not accepted without sound pretence
Of active or of passive excellence.

"The King Who formed this realm, which hath no night,
Of every love compact, and all delight,
So that no thought should dare to add to this
The vain conception of more perfect bliss,
Hath mind created in His Own glad sight
Endowed with many graves diversely;
And this high court of bliss which here you see
Doth vindicate His wisdom wondrously.
This truth explicit is in scripture shown,
As when those twins unborn, within the womb,
In anger differed. Different worths assume
As different aspects here, enchapleted
To equal their prenatal grace: as keen
As turn they to the light, the light responds.

"In the first ages innocence alone
Secured salvation to the child of those
Who were themselves devout. A later day
Allowed male children such release if they
Were circumcised and sinless. After that
The period of full grace full rite required
Of Christian baptism, that the innocent wings
Should gather power to soar.

"But turn thy mind
The ultimate goal of thy long quest to find.
Fix on the fairest in this sacred place
Thine eyes full adoration: hers the face
Which of all faces is most like to His
Who was her mortal Son. Its radiance
Alone can fit thee Christ Himself to see."

I looked and saw. No earlier marvellings
Through all upward mine upward course were like to this:
No other semblance seemed to God so nigh.
Those angels who frequent the loftiest sky
Cast rapture round her, while that minister
Who first had said the joyous words to her
Ave Maria, spread his wings to bow
In reverence toward her as he sang them now.
His song the holy rose from every side
Returned; and as the choiring bliss replied,
On every face upraised, serene before,
There came a new contentment.

"Father, who,
Leaving the seat of thine eternal due,
Hast condescended to me, wilt thou tell
That angel's name who loves his Queen so well
That, as he gazes on her eyes, he seems
Aflame with adoration?"

He who drew
Beauty from Mary as the morning dew
Shines from the sunlight, answered: "Equally
Sweetness and triumph meet in him, for he
Brought down the palm to Mary, when the Son
To bear our burden was Himself undone.
Praise without envy unto God we give
That his joys are to ours superlative.

"But turn thine eyes to follow, while I tell
Of the high paladins of Heaven, who dwell

In this august dominion. Those whose seats
Are highest, either side our Queen most high,
And so most blissful, being to her most nigh,
Are as two roots from which one single rose
To this supreme exultant beauty grows.

"He on her left hand, of our race the first,
Is he whose rebel hand audacious durst
Pluck the sweet fruit which had such bitter taste
To all men after. On the right is he
To whom Christ gave the keys of liberty
To enter this fair rose; and next beside
The seer of Patmos who, before he died,
Beheld the tribulations of the bride
Who with the nails and with the Lance was won.

"And seated by that other, he who led
The folk who were with meals of manna fed,
Thankless, inconstant, mutinous. The next
To Peter seated, Anna, keeps her eyes
Fixed on her daughter in such tranced wise
That even *Hosanna* she omits to sing.
And next beyond the greatest ancestor
Sits Lucia, she who, when thine eyes, perplex
By earthly travail, lifted not to see
This periled heritage, thy lady roused
To be thy rescue.

"But the moments flee.
Short is thy time allowed. The tailor cuts
According to the cloth. Thy glances now
Lift to the Ultimate Love! Endeavouring
As far as may be possible to thee
To penetrate its incomparable light.

"But since weak pinions from so great a height
May flutter backward, let us pause to call
For aid so powerful that thou shalt not fall.
Heed thou my prayer for grace not impotent,
Following me with a single mind intent,

That not words only, but the heart be there."

So speaking, he began this holy prayer.

Canto XXXIII.

"Virgin and Mother, Daughter of thy Son,
Humblest and highest of our mortal race,
In whom was Hell's dark counsel first fordone,
In whom high God took being without disgrace,
So did our nature gain in nobleness
From thine incarnate purity: through whom
Love warmed the eternal peace within thy womb
To bear the flower we now unfolded see!
All love is sphered in thee, all loveliness
In thy bright torch; and those who wait below
In thee the living spring of hope shall know.
Lady, such greatness and such worth is thine
That any who without thine aid would shine
Would wings contemn the while he seeks to fly.
Not only those who on thy grace rely
Are fenced about by thy benignity,
But oft thy succour doth the prayer precede.

"In thee is pity for the human need,
In thee is tenderness to intercede,
In thee is largesse of that excellence
Which doth include all valours of soul and sense
Wherein thou art supreme of all create.

"Lady, there is one here who comes equipped
With earthly soilure. One whose feet have dipped
In Hell's deep cesspool. One whose eyes have viewed
Each tribulation, each beatitude,
Which grades the glories of the upward way.
Now doth he for this greatest mercy pray,
That he may lift his mortal eyes to know
The ultimate bliss. I never burned to plead
For deeper vision for myself with more
Intensity than now I speak his need.

But do thou yet my prayers intensify!
I pray thee, add thy prayers, of potency
More than are mine, that he be purified
From every stain of his mortality,
The supreme ultimate Light unveiled to see.

"And further, Queen, I for his rescue pray
That thou, whom all things must on earth obey,
To serve thee thy desires, shalt grant him this:
That not the vision of so great a bliss
Shall lose its power upon him. Grant that he
All human impulse may in future rein
To heavenly purpose. See Beatrice, how
She doth with folded hands entreat thee now,
And the ranked saints alike my prayer sustain."

Those eyes, to which one time, with childhood's love,
God had looked upward, now looked down to see
Her suppliant, with a glance that tenderly
Expressed her gladness at devotion's prayer.
Then to the eternal light that showed above
She raised them. None create, it well may be,
So deeply into that strong light shall see.

Thereat I knew the culmination nigh
Of that long pilgrimage, and reverently
I stilled mine aspirations, all my mind
Emptying, the fullness of High God to find.

Saint Bernard signed me now that Light to know,
But I already of myself was so
As he would have me. Eyes unvanquished now
Lifted and saw. With deepening gaze I knew
The simply, utterly, entirely True.

But what I saw therein no words could tell,
No human memory from God's citadel
Retire with plunder of its wondrous store.
As he who dreamed, and can recall no more,
Nor that from his encumbered mind dismiss,

So toiled am I. I know no more than this:
I dreamed. I waked. I know the sweetness yet,
Though the deep source my yearning thoughts forget.
Where is the snow that faced the mounting sun?
What search shall find it? When the winds were done,
Where had the leaves of Sybil wisdom blown?

Yet something, O Thou Light Supreme, Alone,
Transcendent of all mortal search! Allow
To recollection. Something grant me now,
Though but one spark, that I once more may see!
And power of utterance, that their eyes may glean
Some splendour backward brought who have not seen!

Surely it must be to Thy praise that I
Bring something back to earth, some memory
To tell in human speech inadequate
That inexpressible glory! This I know:
Had mine eyes wavered from that sacred glow
I had been irretrievably lost. Therefore,
Aware of peril, did I strive the more
The weight of infinite value to sustain.

O grace abundant, which supplied my sight
With strength to face the everlasting Light,
To comprehend and be consumed therein;
Which gave me power in that profundity
All things created through all space to see
Gathered by Love to form a single gain,
Like pages scattered, lost, but once akin,
Regathered, in one ordered book to be.
All incident, all accident, and all
The crossing chances which to men befall,
All varying substance and perverse event,
Were here made perfect, in one brightness blent.

This I believe with mortal eyes I saw,
For as I ponder that supernal law
And as I now declare it, ecstasy
Floods through me, with no other cause to be.

Not five and twenty centuries have hid
The Argo's launching, since the distant day
When its broad shadow on the waters slid,
Amazing Neptune, as that moment did,
Separating itself from mine unequal mind.
Intent, oblivious, rapt, I gazed to find
My heart enkindled from a source made blind
To recollection. At that fount divine
Shall no man drink so deep a draught as mine
And thirst for coolness of a different spring.

For all wills seek the good, and everything
Of good, of every kind, is there complete
Which men may otherwise defective meet,
Partial at best, there perfected. My speech
Strives, but no further to its goal may reach
Than might an infant's tongue, the milk that feels
Drawn from its mother, as it now reveals
The Ultimate Wonder. Not that more or less
Was in that Light, its essence to express,
Than one unvaried semblance. Yet therein,
As my sight strengthened to explore, I viewed
Three shining circles of one magnitude,
But diverse in their coloured beauty. Two
Were Iris unto Iris. But the third
Was from the Others breathed, an effluent fire;
From each an equal radiance. Oh, how crude,
How slow to soar is any human word,
To that which recollection holds! And how
Doth memory strain and fail to picture now
That depth of increate Light! O Light divine,
Who art Thyself Thine own abiding-place!
Who all dost comprehend, and all embrace;
Who by Thyself must comprehended be,
But by none other: Who Thyself dost see,
And inwardly upon Thyself dost shine,
And in that contemplation take delight,
Love on Itself reflecting!

As I gazed,
It seemed that form was on that painted Light
Pictured in human semblance. There I raised
Eyes tranced and raptured by that wondrous sight.

As the geometer the circle strives
In vain to measure, thinking uselessly
For that he lacks, which yet he knows must be,
The evading principle, so now was I.
How did the image with the circles blend?
How were they separate? This to comprehend
I strove, as wingless worms might strive to fly.
Yet for one flashing instant even this
Was granted. Vain, recoiled, remembered bliss!
My mind sank backward on itself, too far
Lifted to there establish. But no less
Desire and resolution formed to press
My purpose, like an equal-rolling wheel,
This marvelled revelation to express
In words that naught pervert, and naught conceal,
Urged by that Love by Whom all creatures are;
Who guides the sun, and every following star.

The End