From Dante Alighieri’s
LA DIVINA COMMEDIA

THE DIVINE COMEDY

An attempt at translation into English by
Michele Fanelli

Milano
1997-1999
Contents

HELL
Foreward  2
First Chant  7
Second Chant  11
Third Chant  15
Fourth Chant  19
Fifth Chant  23
Sixth Chant  27
Seventh Chant  30
Eighth Chant  34
Ninth Chant  38
Tenth Chant  42
Eleventh Chant  46
Thirteenth Chant  53
Fourteenth Chant  57
Fifteenth Chant  61
Sixteenth Chant  65
Seventeenth Chant  69
Eighteenth Chant  73
Nineteenth Chant  77
Twentieth Chant  81
Twenty-first Chant  85
Twenty-second Chant  89
Twenty-fourth Chant  97
Twenty-fifth Chant  101
Twenty-seventh Chant  109
Twenty-eighth Chant  113
Twenty-ninth Chant  117
Thirtieth Chant  121
Thirty-first Chant  125
Thirty-second Chant  129
Thirty-third Chant  133
Thirty-fourth Chant  137

PURGATORY
Foreward  142
First Chant  147
Second Chant  151
Third Chant  155
Fourth Chant  159
Fifth Chant  163
Sixth Chant  167
Seventh Chant  171
Eighth Chant  175
Ninth Chant  179
Tenth Chant  183
Eleventh Chant  187
Twelfth Chant  191
Thirteenth Chant  195
Fourteenth Chant  199
Fifteenth Chant  203
Sixteenth Chant  207
Seventeenth Chant  211
Eighteenth Chant  215
Nineteenth Chant  219
Twentieth Chant  223
Twenty-first Chant  227
Twenty-second Chant  231
Twenty-third Chant  235
Twenty-fourth Chant  239
Twenty-fifth Chant  243
Twenty-sixth Chant  247
Twenty-seventh Chant  251
Twenty-eighth Chant  255
Twenty-ninth Chant  259
Thirtieth Chant  263
Thirty-first Chant  267
Thirty-second Chant  271
Thirty-third Chant  275

PARADISE

Foreward  280
First Chant  286
Second Chant  290
Third Chant  294
Fourth Chant  297
Fifth Chant  301
Sixth Chant  305
Seventh Chant  309
Eighth Chant  313
Ninth Chant  317
Tenth Chant  321
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chant</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eleventh Chant</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelfth Chant</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirteenth Chant</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourteenth Chant</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifteenth Chant</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixteenth Chant</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventeenth Chant</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighteenth Chant</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nineteenth Chant</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twentieth Chant</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-first Chant</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-second Chant</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-third Chant</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-fourth Chant</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-fifth Chant</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-sixth Chant</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-seventh Chant</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-eighth Chant</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-ninth Chant</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirtieth Chant</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirty-first Chant</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirty-second Chant</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirty-third Chant</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HELL
Pushing aside my keyboard, after writing the last verse of my English translation of Dante's "Inferno", I feel that I’m leaving behind me an immensely entertaining occupation, and at the same time that a very heavy burden has been taken off my shoulders... Why, one is bound to ask, should anyone undertake the near-impossible (and anyway dubious) task of attempting -now, on the eve of the XXIst Century- another English version of the famous XIVth Century Italian poem? Why, moreover, such a farfetched idea should come to a civil engineer (with only a fair working knowledge of modern, "international" English)?

I can give only some partial, lame explanations.

On reading Dante’s masterpiece I was always overwhelmed by the impression of being transported by a "vehicle" of incredible power; I know that this impression is shared by other people. The mechanics and structure of the tool he used (and largely invented), namely early Italian, are very interesting to analyze. His use of verbal imagery is masterful; his power of synthesis is matchless, so that with a very sparing use and choice of words he gets the maximum of vivid representation (as attested by the numerous illustrators who were drawn to attempt visual representations of Dante's creation: Doré, Dalí, to name just two).

A man of mixed culture (in my case a "classical" high-school education and technical University courses) very easily can get an itch to mimic, or "reverse-engineer", this use of the linguistic structure. I felt, at several points in my life, that the next best thing would be to try and render that structure in another language. The choice of English was dictated by the fact that I feel more at home in that language than in French or in Spanish (which, on the other hand, being nearer to Italian could have more easily invited invidious comparisons).

I was well aware, of course, of the numerous pitfalls into which I was bound to fall. I try to expose hereunder just a few of them, beginning with the more "technical" topics.

First of all, although, as said above, Dante's Italian is very concise, the English language is structurally more concise than Italian: suffice it to compare the large number of monosyllabic words in English with the large percentage of polysyllabic words in Italian. As a result (wanting to strictly preserve the verse structure, including the rhyming pattern, and the length of the poem) I had quite often to fill in the English version with small inserts which are not there in the original (extra adjectives, adverbs or small "parenthetic clauses" e.g.). This gives to the translation a slightly emphatic, “baroque” flavour as contrasted with the austerely spare “romanesque-early Gothic” impression of the original.

As a compromise, I sometimes used the extra space to insert brief “explanations” where the original text would be particularly obscure for English-speaking readers. This device, which I used as sparingly as possible, cannot of course be applied where long digressions would be called for in order to illustrate points now forgotten of XIIIth century politics, so frequently alluded to by Dante, or some subtle doctrinal dissertations. For these, lengthy footnotes should be added to the translation; this part I completely neglected, although it should be an essential requisite for most non-Italian readers.

Another “technical” problem was posed by the preservation of the endecasyllabic, alternatingly rhyming “tercet” structure (ABA BCB CDC DED...). To mimic this structure in my English version I was often forced to use end words of each verse that are not exactly adequate to the semantic content, but are instead slightly “off-key” synonyms; I was also often led to twist in awkward ways the ordering of the sentence parts.

Thirdly, I have not a sufficient knowledge of archaic English to try and give a translation “synchronic” with Dante’s age, or at least nearly so. I peppered the translation with some old-English expressions in order to give it a certain flavour of antiquity, but the result is a mixed language which is neither here nor there. Many readers, I can well imagine, would find this intolerable on many accounts and, quite probably, in very bad taste. (One might quite legitimately point out that there have been many English translations of Divina Commedia, some of them highly distinguished, and a few quite recent; see in this context the article: “Dante made plain”
by Clive Wilmer, on the Times Literary Supplement, Sept. 6, 1996. On one hand, thus, there was no need or justification for a new version by a newcomer to the field, and not a very qualified person at that. On the other hand, had I looked at those translations? The answer is NO; I felt I would be irremediably influenced by anything that I could read in that line; on the contrary, I wanted the result to be entirely mine, for good or worse).

Now for the more substantial stumbling blocks in my path. I felt in some way as a “bricoleur” trying to use inadequate knowledge and tools to assemble a monumental structure following an intimidating template. The mighty heartbeat, the deep breathing rhythm of the poem, its high peaks and precipitous crags I saw smoothed out, or made cartoonish, by the translator’s feeble hand; the very coarseness used by Dante whenever functional to his grand design was drained of blood or made simply vulgar; the vibrant texture of the language was made plainer and drab, or else rhetorically bloated. If you think of, or if you ever saw at work, a “dilettante” copyist of Monna Lisa in the Louvre, you may find an apt comparison of sorts. What you get is a deformed caricature of the real thing: the powerful, elegant lines are either deflated or rendered by emphatic, awkward strokes; the subtle hues are lost in a neutral fog or substituted by strident, lurid colours; the overall harmony is transformed into a painfully belabored look. Or, in a more benevolent view, my work could be compared to the “professional” translations in the same way that a “naïf” painting can be compared to a work in the “official” mainstream of pictorial art. (Somewhat impertinently I could venture to ask in this context: if “naïf” art can be accepted as something respectable, why not a “naïf” translation of Dante?...) Some of these difficulties I burrowed around (or under), rather than meeting them head on; my personal limits and inadequacies did not allow me to do otherwise. I am well aware that this makes for a “watered down” version, in which much of the original force and impact is lost.

Yet the power of Dante’s language is so irresistible that sometimes, somehow, it can suddenly shine through this opaque screen. When it does, it gives the rash craftsman an exhilarating thrill. I hope that these few shafts of light can also break through to some of the readers (if any).

I am indirectly confirmed in this impression, or better this hope, by the personal experience that the more “inspired” verses of Dante turned out –to my great surprise– to be much less difficult to translate than those more dull, or uninspired. (Yes, it happens that even Dante is not always at the peak of inspiration. There are not a few places in the Divina Commedia in which you can feel a definite slackening of tension; there are also long enumerations of names or digressions about some obscure philosophical, historic or theological points which today are of very little interest, at least for the average reader. Those pieces posed supplementary problems for me, and I am fully conscious that the solutions I was able to put together are, in a way, only patched-up ones). I was tempted, to tell the truth, to translate only “the best” Chants; but I felt, on one hand, that this would not be fair play and that I should take in my stride the rough as well as the smooth; on the other hand, the criterion according to which I would choose the “best” parts would inevitably be a subjective one, and thus open to criticism).

It may well turn out that this effort of mine will have no readers other than myself and, perhaps, a few close friends; in the last analysis, however, I must recognize that I undertook this endeavour (which I intended from the beginning to carry through –if at all feasible– only as far as the 34 Chants of the “Inferno”: to go further being, I felt and still feel at present, too overwhelming a task for me) mainly and first of all to accept an intellectual challenge and to please myself. (Might I say, without being laughed at, that I felt, and tried to answer, a call?)

As another (much later) Italian poet (G. Carducci) put it, in a poem which is best forgotten for its emphatic tone:

... “the poor craftsman for himself
makes a dart
golden; shoots it at the sun;
looks at how high on it’s soaring
and is twinkling;
looks, rejoices, asks no more.”

To end this brief introduction, I am perfectly aware that any translation is never “equivalent” or “isomorphic” to the original: indeed, it becomes inevitably a separate work, although of course “correlated” with the original
by important common semantic contents. The translator is given a certain spectrum of choices, within some constraints; so he can privilege the substance or the form, and within each of these fundamental choices he can choose from a panoply of words and of verbal forms.

(If I can take a leaf from the mathematicians’ book, I would say that this loss of exact correspondence is similar to what you get in the basic problem of cartography: two projections of the same reality – the earth surface’s features – according to different systems can only have in common some, not all, of the properties – areas, angles... – represented in each of them).

In my case, I tried to strike a middle way, being as faithful to the original phrasing as possible but on frequent occasions departing even quite drastically from it when I couldn’t in any other way try to preserve the ringing of the verse or the rhyming structure. For me, indeed, Dante is inseparable from the solemn, sedate yet agile rhythm of the alternating-rhyme tercets. My rendering, as a result of the abovementioned very stringent constraints, is of course quite frequently a cumbersome, awkward one; I accept this as a consequence both of my personal limits and of the basic choice already alluded to.

The exercise of rendering Dante in English was not only a personal challenge, but perhaps more importantly a means of “total immersion” in the depths of the Divina Commedia. I was able in this way to observe at close hand and, as it were, under a magnifying glass the meaning and the mechanics of the poem. While it would be too long and difficult to report, even in a summary way, the personal enrichment I got during this experience, I cannot pass over a remark on the descriptive technique of Dante. When confronted with the task of conveying to the reader an unfamiliar or complex scene, Dante characteristically chooses a technique which with today’s insight can only be defined as “physiological”. We know that our brain sees what it already knows; in other words, it tries – as a first attempt at interpretation of the sensory inputs – to impose over the new stream of sensations coming from external reality its own precast schemes, derived from previous experiences. In much the same way, Dante transmits to the reader first of all a general sense of complexity and of confusion; then, in a second “scanning” of the scene, he tries to recognize an underlying structure, using as a prop some familiar images embodied in vivid similes; eventually, he goes over the scene a final time, defining the details and focusing the interrelations of different parts. This technique, besides being “natural”, is also extremely effective in bringing up a self-imposing sharp visual representation.

I cannot, at last, pass over one more remark. Curiously, I was propelled all along by a sense of urgency: as soon as a Chant was finished, I felt uneasy (as if fearful I would no longer be able to go on) until I had begun the next one. At the same time, every new Chant was an invariably daunting task which I approached, each time, with identically strong qualms. In other words, I never “got used”, or familiarized, with this kind of challenge: Dante always kept me at arm’s length, never allowing the slightest sensation of “familiarity” with his masterpiece. In this sense Dante was for me a demanding master, always urging me to go on according to my best capacities and beyond, yet never letting pass unnoticed my inadequacies and remaining ever (in what was an exquisitely exasperating way) a very distant, elusive, beckoning goal.

In this I find myself completely at difference with other modern admirers of Dante. I recall in this context the chapter on Dante in the “Lives” by H.W. Van Loon, a quite popular author in the Fourties. There Van Loon, feigning that he is allowed to call from the dead, and interview, the illustrious persons of the past, spins out a tale about a dinner with Dante, who comes to the invitation accompanied by two devils as “familiars”. In this way the Author tries to bring Dante nearer to the reader, but he only succeeds in substituting a discoloured cardboard caricature for the real man.

Now a few statistics and curiosities about my work. The first “twinkle in the eye” was more than twenty years back when on a sudden whim I tried to translate parts of the Ist, XXVIth and XXXIIIrd Chants (the “wild wood”, Ulysses, Earl Ugolino respectively) just to test my hand. All in all, the verses I translated on that remote occasion amounted to maybe 50 tercets or less, i.e. about as much as one Chant.

In June 1997 (three years and a half after my retirement, with some spare time on my hands) the fancy took me again, in a more virulent form, so once I set out to it I couldn’t really stop. My typical working rate would be of 10-20 tercets a day or more; not all days, however, I could attend to the translation. In an average month I could translate from 3 to 5 Chants, according to the intensity and frequency of my other commitments.

The total number of tercets translated is about 1,600. The day I completed the translation was Feb. the first,
1998.
I worked directly, most of the times, on a Power Macintosh 6100/66, using the WORD 6.0.1 software; every Chant took up about 25 KB. I was drawn, somewhat mischievously, to use the type “Old English Text” (14pts.); this gave me, curiously, a more reassuring sense of being on the right track than the use of a modern type, or a handwritten draft, would have given (as I experienced whenever the circumstances led me away from my computer). For other readers, however, I generated also a more readable version using the “New York” type (10 pts.).

The translation of each Chant was revised several times and saved both on the hard disk and on a back-up floppy. I did not translate the Chants in their order. This was done in part to avoid the psychological impression of having to escalate a gruesome, long steep slope with the end summit in very remote sight, in part in order to have a seemingly more uniform end product. In fact, inevitably my style and skills of translation would change as the work progressed; if I had translated all the Chants in their numerical order, this progressive change could have become apparent to the reader. After the first ten Chants, I translated therefore a number of isolated ones and then gradually filled in the voids, until I was left with only 9 single-Chant gaps. At this point I felt reassured that the end was in sight; on Dec. 1997, on the eve of a longish interruption for the year end’s festivities, I was left with only seven Chants to translate. The last Chant to be turned into English was the XXXIIInd, begun -in what turned out as something of an anticlimax- at the end of January, 1998.

Some of the close friends who followed my endeavour used to ask me repeatedly what “method” I utilized in achieving the alternate rhymes, which appeared to them as the greatest difficulty. Apart from the fact that this is a mainly “technical” difficulty (and in this sense the question was indeed a legitimate one), but in my opinion not the greatest challenge I had to face, my answer is that I had no method other than the old “trial and error”, or better “forward and backtrack”. In other words, I put down a first attempt of translation of each next verse without much direct thought to the rhyming and successively I refined the verses, including those immediately preceding if needed, to achieve the desired effect. This process was necessarily slow and often required several “passes” over each tercet.

Of course I had to consult quite frequently a dictionary, not only for finding the right words but also to be reasonably assured that the correct pronunciation would provide the desired rhyming. I used mainly the Hazon-Garzanti English-Italian and Italian-English dictionary, as well as several editions of the Oxford monolingual. For Christmas 1997 I was presented by my wife with a welcomed gift: the Merriam-Webster Dictionary of Synonyms.

A book of English rhymes would also have been extremely useful; but it was not in my possession, nor in my use, during my enterprise. To this day I ignore even if it exists.

I was encouraged by several friends and relatives not to let go of my effort. Particularly enthusiastic support I received from my friend Carlo “Nikko” Niccolai, who got by e-mail first-draft copies of each Chant as soon as translated. Most of the times he was so patient as to read them! My wife Cesira was a particularly stern critic, but I owe much to her sharp remarks in the way of making the translation more readable (or at any rate less cumbersome) and generally better.

My two sisters “Nenne” and “Cia” were rather mildly amused and interested; their command of the English language, they claimed, was not deep enough to form a judgement of my work. To my younger brother “Gion”, who is the intellectual of the family, for a long time I had not the nerve of even speaking of my rash endeav-our.... My two sons Mario and Alberto were impressed and curious, but at their young age they had their hands very much too full with their professional and private-life occupations to follow closely the progress of my strange new hobby. Alberto put my translation on an Internet page!

Some of my friends and acquaintances, lastly, thought that I had gone a little out of my wits. Maybe they were right; indeed, any rational appraisal of my possibilities would have strongly pointed against undertaking the task. To my excuse and defense I can only say that no enterprise is ever undertaken on purely rational grounds, and remark that if one should only enter into those tasks he/she is perfectly prepared for, very few things would ever be accomplished. In this context, it is perhaps fit to recall here an old French saying:

« Plus fous, plus sages »...
To those, at last, who shall feel -after reading the results of my efforts- that I have embarked upon an impossible task and have (predictably) utterly failed, I offer in a lighter vein, as a self-mocking comment, the well-known rigmarole:

« Everybody said it couldn't be done.
With a smile he set out to it.
He tackled the thing that couldn't be done
And couldn't do it. »

Milano, June 1997-February 1998
**First Chant**

**Halfway through Man’s allotted walk of life**
I found myself in a dark wood astray,
That the straight way was lost; and lo!, I’m rife

In hardships, even as I try to say
How was this rough and tough and tangled wood
Whose fearful thought still makes my senses sway.

Such harshness death itself hardly attain could;
But, to relate the good I found inside,
What I there saw truly describe I should.

I cannot say what led in there my stride,
So full of sleep was I, when first the blame
Was mine, for leaving the true path aside.

At the foot of a hill at last I came,
Where ended that dark valley’s narrow crack
That pricked my heart with fear; and on that same

Moment, by looking up, I caught its back
Already clad by that main planet’s ray
That leads each man straight on the proper track.

My terrors could I, then, somewhat allay
That in the dark pool of my heart abode
All night, to such pitiful feelings prey.

And, as the man who deadly waters strode
With panting haste the shore at last attains,
Turns, and stakes at the dangers he just rode,

So my soul, cringing still from recent pains,
Turn’d to consider the momentous strait
From which no soul alive salvation gains.

My tired body rest’d some time in wait,
I take my way along the lonesome shore,
Lowermost leaning my uneven gait.

And lo!, just where the slope is getting more
Steep, a she-pard supple and nimble much,
That an all-over speckled mantle wore,

Stood, and from sight did not depart; and such
Was the hindrance she made to mine ascent,
Many a time would I turn back out of touch.

‘Twas early morning; in the firmament
Sun was rising, together with the lights
That were with it, when God’s loving intent
First impelled all those beautiful sights;
So that to hope for good, of that wild beast
Gaudily spotted, lent to me some rights 14

The hour of day and the sweet time not least.
But not so, that fright couldn't shoot its dart
When at a lion's sight such hope surceas'd.

This one appear'd to come toward my part
With raised head and with high-famish'd rage,
So that the very air seem'd to lose heart.

And a she-wolf, that in her spare rib-cage
Look'd as though charged with all kind of lust,
And wretched many a life in each past age, 17

So much aggriev'd me further that, all trust
Lost at that fearful view to gain more height,
To stop and turn around perforce I must.

And, as the man that much has bought of late,
And the time comes when he turns destitute,
That tearful thoughts on his sad soul put weight, 19

Such was I made by the peaceless brute,
That toward me would come, and in due course
Would push me down where the Sun's rays were mute.

While I tumble downhill all rough and coarse,
In front of me, lo! I behold the sight
Of one who seem'd for a long silence hoarse.

When I saw him in that deserted night,
"Have mercy on me!" I toward him then cried,
"Be thou a ghost, or man thou be by right."

Answered he then: "No man, a man I died,
And my parents hail'd both from Lombard shores,
From Mantua, indeed, between two waters dried.

Under Julius was I born, pagan lores
Not yet dispell'd, and in Rome did I trust
To live, when great Augustus set new mores.

Poet was I, and I sang of that just
Son of Anchises, who set sails from Troy
When Ilium the exalted burn'd to dust.

But why dost thou go back to such annoy?
Why don't thou climb the delectable mount
Which is cause and beginning of all joy?"

“Now Virgil wouldst thou be, that endless fount,
Who spreads of wisdom such abundant stream?”
Answer’d I then, asham’d to great account.

“Honour of all the poets, lamp who gleam,
Would that the long perusal and great love
I brought thy book, gainsake thy lofty esteem.

Thou art my Master, the author I so strove
To write after, the only one who lent
Me the good style which honours did behove.

See the wild beast that made me break the ascent:
Help me from her, thou sage of greatest fame,
That she makes wrists and veins all shaky and bent.”

“Other way behoves thee” th’answer then came
To my tearful appeal, “if from this place
Thou want to escape alive and in good name,

Because the brute which makes thee cry for grace
Never lets others cross her deadly path,
But their progress so impedes in its pace
That at last she kills them; so full of wrath
Her kind is, of ill lust never to sate,
That soon after each meal more hunger hath.

With many beasts she breeds, all full of hate,
And more yet they will be, till the great Hound
Shall come, who shall fulfil her painful fate.

This neither will have nourish’d gold nor ground,
But Knowledge, Love and Virtue deeply engrained,
And between Felt and Felt his country is found.

By him that humble Italy be gained
Shall to salvation, for which virgin died
Camilla, and Nisus and Eurialus pained.

The Hound shall chase the Wolf from ev’ry side,
From town to town, till into Hell at last
He will throw her, whence first she hail’d her pride.

Thus I for thy good fate deem and forecast
Thou needst my lead to follow safe and fair,
And to be drawn through realms that ever last,

Where thou shalt hear the screams of high despair,
See the most ancient spirits lost in sorrow,
Crying out for new death in cursed lair;

Then shalt thou visit those, who hope tomorrow,
Though now in fire, to come, by God’s bless’d hand,
To the blissful abode no one can borrow.
To which if thou shouldst wish at last to ascend,
A worthier soul to this shall have to see,
And her I'll pray that thee new wings she lend;

Because that King forbade such souls as me,
Who ignored His law, to enter where He abides,
Into the City that forever be.

In all parts His supreme rule overrides;
Here is His town, here His exalted seat;
O happy those He calls near to His sides!”

And I to him then: “Poet, to be neat
From present evil and from worse waylaid,
I beseech thee, for the God whose high treat

Thou were denied, to be led where thou said,
So I can see Saint Peter’s mansion hollow’d,
And those thou paint in sorry money paid”.

Then he set out, and in his steps I follow’d.
Second Chant

The day was waning, and the dusky sky
Solac'd from daily toil each earthly life,
While alone of all souls kept vigil I,

Bracing to bear the brunt of a fierce strife,
Both from the journey and from piety high-pent,
That memory'll bring forth, truthful midwife.

O Muses, o intellect, help my intent;
Thou, mind of mine, that wrote all that I saw,
Here will be seen if well thy fame is lent.

"Poet" I began, "my steps from thee take law;
My virtue judge, if strongly enough it's planted,
Ere I commit myself to a quest so raw.

They say, that Silvius' parent was warranted
In flesh to visit the everlasting reign,
And with live senses was his journey granted.

In truth, that evil's Enemy should deign
To grace him so, considering the effect
That was to issue from such noble strain,

Does seem a worthy thing, t'any intellect,
For him of lofty Rome and its empire
Highest heavens as father would elect;

Which both, as their due course was to expire,
Were established as the saintly gate
Where the great Peter's heir feeds the holy fire.

As of that wondrous journey thou relate,
He learn'd there things that were the seed and root
Of Rome's high rule and of its papal fate.

Then the Vase of election there set foot,
So that the faith which to salvation leads
Could be strengthen'd and not rendered moot.

But why should I go there? Who for me pleads?
I'm not Aeneas, not a Paul for this ride;
Not I, nor man in me such worth now reads.

So that, if I should yield to such rash pride,
Strongly I fear lest I make a foolish claim.
Be wise, and understand what more I hide".

And, as the man who unwills his previous aim
Because new thoughts with earlier wish won't cope,
And all former beginnings starts to maim,
Thus I changed myself on that dark slope,
For, thinking, I foreran my enterprise
That in the inception was so fast in hope.

“If I well caught thy meaning in disguise”,
Answer’d then of the noble man the shade,
“By cowardice thy soul cut short its rise;
Which many a time well-meaning men forbade
To carry on with praiseworthy deed,
As skittish beasts turn back from rustling glade.

So that from such distress thou canst be freed,
I’ll tell thee, when I first pitied thy throe,
What I heard and why came I with such speed.

I was among those with suspended woe;
A blessed beauty there upon me called,
Such that at her command swift I would go.

Her gleaming eyes more than a star enthralled;
And she began to address me, sweet and fain,
With angel’s voice, so that my heart just stalled:

«O gentle soul who hail from Mantua’s plain,
Whose work still in the world wins such wide fame,
And until the world lasts new fame will gain,
My friend, to Fate no friend, is being made lame
There in the desert slope by fear, to a point
That in his path he’s turning back, to shame;

And I’m afraid he’s so with sin conjoin’d,
After what up in Heavens heard I told,
That methinks to his rescue late I join’d.

Now go, and by ornate discourse and bold
Help him with all thy might to win the day,
So that from this full comfort I can hold.

Beatrice I am, who send thee on thy way;
I came from places where I long to endure,
And Love moved my steps and prompt’d my say.

When I will face again my Lord, for sure,
I often for this deed will praise thy name».
When she was silent, I began secure:

«O woman of great virtue, whose sole fame
Allows mankind to exceed what in the small
Sphere is contain’d that takes up Moon’s name,
I am so pleased by thy gracious call,
That at once to comply would be too late;
Thy will just said, thou shalt obtain it all.

But tell me how it comes, it does not grate
On thee till this low center to descend,
From the wide space where thee calls back thy fate».

«Since thus deep» she then answer’d «thou intend
To know, briefly the reason shall I tell
No dread my will to enter here can bend.

Afraid we rightly are, even in Hell,
Only of those things that can bring us to doom;
All others are not dreadful, hear me well.

I was so woven, on God’s mighty loom,
That I’m not touched by your wretched pains,
Nor flame in me from these your fires finds room.

Gentle woman high up is, who complains
Of this predicament where thou art sent,
So that harsh verdict by her tears contains.

This one asked for Lucy in good intent,
And told her: - Now thy faithful thy help needs,
And I pray thee that a swift help be lent -.

Lucy, so alert against all cruel deeds,
Set out, and came to hills of lovely banks,
Where ancient Raquel’s friendship oft me leads.

Said she: - Beatrice, to God endless thanks!
Why don’t thou care about thy lover’s sins,
He who for thee rose from the lowly ranks?

Dost not thou hear his sobs’ pitiful dins,
Dost not thou see Death battling him at last
On the black river no sea ever wins? -

Nobody was in worldly things so fast
To pursue gain or evil to repel,
As, after those harsh words had made me aghast,

I here descended from my blissful cell,
Confiding in the immortal earnest say
Which honors thee and those who hear thee well».

After she did to me these things convey,
She avert’d her tearful eyes’ glistening glance,
Which spurred me to leave without delay.

At her behest I came; for thy good chance
I took thee away from that wild beast that made
Thee from this fine mount’s crest to turn askance.
Then why to stray? Why does thy will thus fade?
Why so great lack of courage to entertain? Why no good heart and boldness yet well bade,
Since those three blessed women, I made plain,
Care after thee in their celestial room,
And my words such good omens spell, and fain?"
As small buds by night frost wilted in gloom,
Under the first sunbeams' whitening touch,
Raise their stems and their crowns open in bloom,
So I took heart and changed my tired slouch,
And so much goodly boldness filled my chest,
That I began as those who God can vouch:
"O pitying soul that to my rescue press'd!
And courteous thou, that swift obey'd her call
After her truthful words made clear her quest!
Thou hast with eager words so well my fall
Of heart check'd, that from here I long to part,
As my first will came back, shaking fear's pall.
Let us take way, with single mind and heart,
Thou my master, my teacher and my goad".
Then he stepp'd on; and as he took the start,
I entered the high sylvan byroad.
Third Chant

“THROUGH ME ONE’S LET INTO THE CITY OF SORROW,
THROUGH ME ONE’S LET INTO EVERLASTING PAIN,
THROUGH ME ONE JOINS THE THRONGS THAT LOST THEIR MORROW.

JUSTICE MOV’D MY HIGH MAKER, NOT DISDAIN;
BY DIVINE POWER WAS I MADE, AND BY
SUPERNAL WISDOM AND FIRST LOVE SOV’REIGN.

NO THINGS WERE MADE, ERE CREATED WAS I,
IF NOT ETERNAL, AND ETERNAL I LAST:
LAY DOWN ALL HOPE, YE WHO STEP IN, AND CRY”.

My eyes upon these dark-hu’d words ran fast
That high above a door were hewn in writ;
So “Hard” I said “on me their sense is cast”.

And my Master, as man with sharpen’d wit:
“Any suspicion to lay down here’s better,
All piety to deaden here is fit,
’Cause we came to the place told in my letter,
That thou canst see the throngs to deep pain wed
That of their minds have lost any good fetter”.

He said and, to mine hand his hand then fed,
While his unworried looks enhanced my will,
Into those secret things my paces led.

Here sighs, cries, high complaints beyond the sill
Resounded in that starless eerie night,
So I could not my tears, entering, still.

Strange languages, tongues hitting one with fright,
Words of pain, anger’d accents, and all round
High and hoarse voices, noise of hands in fight,

Made a tumult that seemed to rebound
Ever, in that timeless air tainted with doom,
As does the sand when winds whirl it around.

And I, who felt my head tied up in gloom,
Asked: “Master, what am I now to hear?
And who’s so won by sorrow in this room?”

And he replied: “These sorry courses steer
The ghosts of those sad people who, for good,
With neither blame nor praise their name made clear.

And they are mingled with that spiteful brood
Of angels that against God did not fight,
Nor took His side, but by themselves stood.
Heaven rejects them, lest be soil'd its light;
Nor suffers deepest Hell their kind enclose,
'Cause beside them the damn'd would shine by right".

"Master," I said, "what heavy pains make those
Shadows their bitter tears so thickly spread?"
"Briefly" said he "shall I this thing disclose.

No hope of death can entertain these dead,
And their blind life is here so lowly set,
That to any other fate their envy is led.

No fame the world to them will ever let
To come; justice and piety those spurn;
Look and walk on, and such as them forget".

And I, looking, a flag to run and turn
Saw at that time, so fleet in its course
That all repose it seem'd to thrash and burn.

Behind it follow'd such a large concourse
Of people, that I could never apprize
Death with so many had taken intercourse.

As some of them I thought to recognize,
I saw the shade of that faint-hearted man
Whom cowardice made glory jeopardize.

Then I soon understood, those who so ran
Belong'd for sure to that most coward hive
By God and His adversary held in ban.

Those wretched souls, who never were alive,
All naked, were tormented in their pace
By blowflies and bad wasps, that down there thrive,

From whose bites streaks of blood ran down each face;
Blood that, mingled with tears, by vermin vile
Was gather'd at their feet and left no trace.

And, as I push'd my gaze beyond their file,
More throngs saw I on a big river's bank;
For which "Master" I said, "tell me awhile,

Who are those down there? What law's to thank
For making them so eager to trespass,
As the dim light shows us amidst their rank?"

"Enlightenment" said he "shall come to pass
When in this walk of ours we take repose
On the Acherontian shore forlorn of grass".

I lower'd then my eyes in shame, because
My words to be molest perchance I thought,  
So that until the stream my speech had pause.  

And lo!, toward our side sails on by boat  
An old man, woolly and white for ancient hair,  
Crying out: “Woe to ye, ye wicked for aught!  

Never have hope to breathe again sweet air:  
To fetch you to the eternal darkness’side  
I come, to searing heat or freezing lair.  

And, o thou that alive here dare to ride,  
From these dead souls without ado take leave”.  
But, seeing that I firm and still abide,  

“Other roads, other harbours thy stars weave”,  
Says he, “to yonder world thy weight to carry:  
It behoves with less tardy ship to heave”.  

And my leader to him: “Charon, don't tarry:  
Thus it is willed there, where will with might  
Is one: ask then no more, nor such will parry”.  

Of that livid marsh’s helmsman so, by fright,  
Still th'hairy cheeks are render'd then and there,  
While his eyes with red flame girdle their sight.  

But those souls, that there stood tired and bare,  
Changed their hue and their teeth set to clatter,  
As soon as they had heard what was their fare.  

They cursed God, their parents and their matter,  
Human kind, and the place, the time, the seed  
Of their seeding and birth in their wild patter.  

Then, all together, they seem’d to make speed,  
Loudly weeping, to that most wretched fall  
That awaits any man of Godless deed.  

Charon demon, with blazing eyes, prods all  
Them on to gather, by his wordless nod;  
And with his oar hard hits all those who stall.  

As autumn makes revert, at last, to sod  
The dead leaves which the branch, up in the sky,  
Abandons where sprang bud, flower and pod,  

In that way the wick’d Adam’s seed saw I  
Hurl themselves, one by one, from land on board,  
By signs, as birds are wont to be call’d by.  

So they are sailing on, cleaving dark fiord,  
And before they alight on yonder beach,  
Again on nearer side gathers new horde.
“My son, all those who death in great sin reach
To this old boat from ev’ry country board”,
The gentle Master then went on to teach;

“And they are eager thus this stream to ford,
Because supernal justice ’s so compelling,
That dread in yearning is convert’d by Lord.

Of a good soul here to sail there ’s no telling;
So, if Charon of thee complaint has taken,
Thou canst well guess what sense his words are spelling”.

As this had pass’d, the dark landscape was shaken
So strongly, that in fright my forehead still
Is moist with sweat, as when bad dreams awaken.

The tearful earth issued forth wind, until
A vermilion light leapt and flash’d on,
That took away from my senses all will;

And I fell down, as man whom sleep has won.
Fourth Chant

Inside my head the deep slumber was broken
When sudden rumbling thunder made me start,
As man befalls who forcefully’s awoken.

I stood up straight, and mov’d to ev’ry part
My rested eyes with intent gaze, to mind
Of my new whereabouts knowledge to impart.

Myself over the brink I seem’d to find,
In truth, of that abysmal darkest vale
Full of endless complaints of every kind.

Its depth and haze would make stoutest hearts quail;
Hard as I tried to push far down my sight,
Discern could I not there the least detail.

“Now we descend to this blind world of night”,
With pale countenance then my Poet said.
“First I, and second thou shall go by right”.

I, who, seeing his colour, turn’d afraid,
“How” said “shall I endure, if thou show fear,
Who to my doubts always support hast made?”

“Piety” replied he “for throngs that here
Are detained, my cheeks happen to paint
With colours that as lack of heart appear.

Let’s go, ’cause a long way’s to be sustain’d”.
Thus he set out and thus he let me inside
The first circle by that abyss contain’d.

Here, if I trust what’s heard from ev’ry side,
Pain there’s not greater than sighing lament,
That through the eternal air moves as a tide.

This proceeds from distress without torment,
Suffer’d by crowds, large and in number strong,
Of kids, women and men of ev’ry bent.

The good Master told me: “Ain’t there among
Thy thoughts questions about those here thou see?
Thou hast to know, ere thou proceed along,

They did not sin; and if merit theirs be,
’Tis not enough, for baptism they did miss,
Which is gate to the faith follow’d by thee;

And, since before Christianity’s saint bliss
They lived, God they didn’t duly adore;
And amongst these I find myself amiss.
For this neglect, not for any other more
Offense, we’re lost, and in this only at pain,
That without hope to endure our lot we’re sore”.

My heart was grieved then with heavy strain,
‘Cause of exalted virtue many I saw
In that limbo a suspended life retain.

“Tell, Master mine from whom I take my law”,
Began I, wanting to strengthen the creed
Which all errors shakes off as dirty straw,

“Did soul ever come out of here, from deed
Its own or others’, to Heaven to go on?”
And he, guessing my question’s hidden seed,

Answer’d: “Down here had I arriv’d anon,
When there was seen a mighty one to enter,
Crowned with signs as wear those who have won.

The first parent he freed from this low center,
His son Abel, Noah of the wondrous Ark,
Obedient Moses of God’s law presenter,

David the king, Abraham partiarch,
Israel with his father, his offspring
And his Raquel, for whom he toiled stark,

And many more, to Heaven all to bring.
And thou must know, before they were redeem’d,
No human soul to salvation took wing”.

Nor the journey for his telling we seem’d
To stop, nay, through the thick of souls we passed
That as trees in a forest down there teem’d.

This side of sleep our way not yet trespassed
Had much, when a fire’s spark attract’d my sight
Which the dark hemisphere with ease surpassed.

Somewhat we were still far from that clear light,
Not so, though, I could not discern in part
That people worthy of honour shar’d such plight.

“O thou who science hast so advanc’d and art,
Who are those so distinguish’d with great favour,
That from all other crowds are set apart?”

“Of their fame” he replied “the noble flavour
Which so in thy world their name lights up, down here
Deserves them to be spar’d from dire pains’ savour”.

A voice I happen’d at that time to hear:
“Honour to the poet above all others high:

His shade, who had depart’d, again is near”.

As this voice’s sound was spent, anon saw I
Four great ghosts toward us direct their way:
Sad were they not, nor happy in mine eye.

Then began my good Master in his say:
“Look at that shade bearing a sword in hand,
Who as king on the other three holds sway:

This is Homer, who rules on poets’ land;
Horace satire the second place then takes,
Third ’s Ovidius: Lucanus holds last stand.

As each of them with me the name partakes
That the lone voice has named, to me their praise
Giving, they witness poetry’s high stakes”.

The school thus gather’d there before my gaze
Of that lord of the most exhalted song
Flying as eagle above all things base.

After they kept discourse down there among
Themselves, to me they turned a friendly sign,
And my master of that smiled all along.

And much greater an honour then was mine,
As within their cohort a place they made,
That I be sixth among those wits so fine.

In that guise we proceed to lesser shade,
Talking of things that better are left out,
As to discourse was fine in that dark glade.

We ’re at the foot now of a castle stout,
Sevenfold by high-cast ramparts enclos’d,
By a fair river guarded all about.

On this as on firm land my feet once pos’d,
Through seven gates with the five sages I pass;
We’re on a meadow with fresh green dispos’d.

Folks there stood who with slow gaze encompass,
Endow’d with high authority in their look;
Seldom they talked, soft, without trespass.

Aside awhile our stand thereon we took,
To a high open spot, whence a fair sheen
Made our gaze all of them easy overlook.

Straight in front over bright emerald green
Were shown to me the great spirits, whose shades
Still great fervour in me stoke, yet unseen.
Electra I saw with many of her comrades,
Amongst whom Hector and Aeneas I knew;
Caesar in arms, with eyes as fierce as blades,

Penthesilea, Camilla and not a few
More; Latinus the king seat'd nearby,
With Lavinia, those lights did clearly shew;

Brutus who Tarquin expell'd, Lucretia I
Saw, Julia, Marcia and Cornelia fair;
Alone, sitting apart, Saladdin high.

As farther still somewhat I rais'd my stare,
The teacher of all wise men was there shown
Learn'd seats with his philosophers to share.

All look'd at him, all honour'd his renown;
Here Plato, here famous Socrates attended
Near, as befits those who like him had sown;

Democritus, who chance to all things extended,
Diogenes, Anassagoras, the Greeks,
Empedocles, Heraclitus there wended;

Thales, Zeno, Dioscorides who seeks
Herbs' qualities, Orpheus, Cicero great,
Linus the poet, Seneca friend of meeks;

Euclid, Ptolemy of stars never to sate,
Hippocrates, Galenus, Avicenne,
Averroès, whose comments high we rate.

Of them all I can't tell the who and when,
'Cause the long way so much impels my tale,
That many a time I miss the there and then.

From sixfold rank now the two split, and hail:
My wise leader leads me to yonder glade,
Out of the tranquil air, into the gale.

And thence I come where no lights pierce the shade.
Fifth Chant

Thus from that first of circles we descended
Down to the next, with lesser space to enclose,
But where much greater wail high grief portended.

Horrid Minos is seen here growl and pose:
The guilt he ponders on the entry, and there
Judges and sends as far as his grasp chose.

I mean, when a lost soul stands, as it were,
In front of him, all of its deeds confesses;
And his knowledge of sins makes him see where

In Hell a site more aptly its guilt addresses.
His tail around as many turns he winds
As rungs the soul be sunk his will expresses.

Always a crowd in front of him one finds:
In turn each soul is to the judgment fed,
They say, they hear, down deep each one then grinds.

“O thou, who to the sorry abode art led”,
Said Minos as he saw me there to dwell,
Halting to act his office weighty and dread,

“Beware of whom thou trust, entering Hell;
Don’t let the inlet’s width thy wit ensnare!”.
And my leader to him: “Why yet to yell?

His fateful journey to hinder don’t care:
Thus is it will’d up there, where will with might
Is one; ask any further never dare”.

Here is beginning the most painful plight
To weigh on me; here have I come at last
Where much abundant tears with me take fight.

I reach’d a place from all light outcast,
Howling as howls the sea for heavy gale,
If winds on its surface fight and contrast.

The infernal storm, from which there is no avail,
Carries the souls with its fury unrelented,
Turning and tossing them in fiery hail.

With cries by those poor souls their fate’s lamented
When they face the most ruinous gusts and blows;
Divine virtue they curse here unrepented.

Thus are chastis’d in their numberless rows,
I understood, the sinners of the flesh,
In whom reason to lust submits and bows.
As the starlings in wintry skies and fresh
On their wings in full ranks and wide are brought,
So those currents hither and thither thresh

The evil spirits that such sins have wrought;
No hope ever comforts them in their throes,
If not of rest, of pain subsiding aught.

And as the cranes fly on singing their woes,
Up in the air drawing a longish file,
Thus I saw, weeping on, some of those foes

Come near, by the bad wind steered awhile,
So that I ask’d: “Who ’re those there flying low
On which so seems the black current to rile?”

“She who ’s the first of those thou want to know
About” my master said to my request,
“As empress many-tongu’d lands held in tow.

In lust she was so inured to plunge and rest,
That whimsy she made lawful for her greed,
To take away the blame, in her behest.

Semiramis she is, of whom we read
That she succeeded Ninus as his wife;
The land she ruled the Sultans now lead.

The next is she who for love took her life,
Breaking the oath to Sichaeus’ ashes sworn;
Cleopatras then thou seest, in deep lust rife.

Helen’s next, for whose sake such a forlorn
Long time was spent, and Achilles is near,
Who with love fought and of his life was shorn.

See Paris, see fam’d Tristan”; he thus here
Shew’d me more than a thousand souls in blame,
All of whom lusty love made lose life dear.

When I had heard my doctor spell the name
Of many a lady and a chivalrous knight,
I almost faint’d, so piety overcame.

I began: “Poet, if I can by right,
Fain would I speak with those two so entwin’d,
Who seem in that wild wind to fly so light”.

And he: “Wait till they are with us align’d;
Then ask them to come nearer in thy pray
For that love which holds them; they’ll come in kind”.

As soon as the strong wind bends them our way,
I rais’d my voice: “O ye tormented pair,
Come speak to us, unless others bid nay!"

As two doves whom desire calls to their lair,
With raised wings and steady, to sweet nest
Come impell'd by their will down through the air,

So out they went of the throng without rest,
Coming to us through the wind which all led,
So strong my cry was with compassion press'd.

"O thou sweet and benevolent, who undaught
In this dead ether wander for salvation,
Visiting us who the earth taint'd in red,

Were it friendly the Lord of all creation,
For thy unending peace Him we would pray,
Since thou show pity for our dire damnation.

But of what ye shall like to hear and say
So will we speak and hear, we souls forlorn,
While the wind does somewhat its fury allay.

Sits up there the fair land where I was born
On the seashore to which the Po descends
To find peace with all brooks from side slopes shorn.

Love, which to gentle hearts so quickly extends,
Took this man of my fair person whose bones
Were taken, in a way that still offends.

Love, which love to the lov'd never condones,
Took me from his fierce rapture so high-strung
That, as thou seest, still lasts beyond death-stones.

Love then led both of us to death unsung:
Caina waits him who our life denied".
With pain these words from memory were wrung.

When I had listen'd to those souls so tried,
I bow'd my head, and so long kept it bent,
That "What thy silence", my lord ask'd, "implied?"

“Alas” at last was my reply’s content,
“How many sweet emotions, how great thrust
Led these two souls to such a sad event!”

Then I turned to the shades, and “Hardly I trust,
Sweet Francesca, overcome my own emotion,
Since at thy tale shed bitter tears I must.

But tell me: at the time of sweet commotion,
How and from what did love in the end deign
To let you be aware of your hearts’ motion?”
And she to me: “There is no greater pain
Than to remember some past happy tie
In sorrow, as thy doctor's rhymes make plain.

But since to know the early root and lie
Of our evil thou show such motivation,
Like those shall I do who speak and cry.

We were reading a day, for delectation,
How Lancelot at last by love was won:
Alone we were, without ill expectation.

Many a time did that reading pry upon
Our bloodless cheeks, and caused our stares to dart;
But only a point we did at last fall on.

When we had come to read the fateful part
Where the fair lover kiss'd her smile, and more,
This one, who never shall from me depart,
My mouth kissed all trembling. In their lore
Author and book were truly go-between;
That day we never read it anymore”.

While saying her tale the afflicted soul had been,
So pitiful the other wept, that my
Senses I lost as though Death had I seen;
And, as falls a dead body, so fell I.
Sixth Chant

With my returning wits, which had been dimmed
From anguish by the lovers’ tale inspired
That all my thoughts with sad confusion rimmed,

New souls tormented in new torments mired
I see all around, wherever I strain
My turning gaze, till with deep pity I'm tired.

In the third circle stand I now, with rain
Accursed, everlasting, cold and dour;
Never does the downpour lose weight, nor gain.

Thick hail with dirty water, frozen scour
Of snow through lightless ether’s falling down:
The ground stinks that receives the putrid pour.

Diverse Cerberus, cruel as its fierce noun,
From three throats with canine fury’s barking
Upon the shades submerg’d in this damp town.

Vermilion eyes, a greasy beard and darking,
The belly has wide, and hands with mighty talons;
The souls it quarters, skins, maims with its marking.

Like rabid dogs the rain makes scream the felons;
They try one side with the other to screen:
Often a time they turn in those damp valons.

When the great worm the two of us had seen,
Three mouths it opened, and at us gnashed each jaw;
All its limbs were with hate trembling and keen.

But my leader his hands was quick to draw,
Scooping up earth, and when his fists were full
He threw it all into each greedy maw.

As when a dog barks under hunger's pull,
That when it fights and strives its meal to bite
All its fury quiets down and stops to bull,

Thus was made the three-faced dirty sight
Of Cerberus the demon, that so screams
Those souls would be deaf rather, if they might.

We were treading on them, bent by the streams
Of crushing rain, and our steps let fall
Upon their likeness, wan as in our dreams.

In the foul mud were they lying, one and all,
Save a shade who rose soon to sit, as fast
As he saw us pass in front of his stall.
“O thou whose way through this low Hell is cast”,
Said he, “my name divine, if thou so can:
Ere my life was unmade, thy birth had pass’d”.

And I to him: “Thy anguish, wretched man,
Methinks at all draws thee out of my mind,
For seems thy face from my memory in ban.

But tell, pray, who thou art, and why thou wind
To such a sorry spot, and hold this pain,
Which, though exceed’d by some, none is so unkind”.

And he: “Thy town, with envy so overlain
That already the measure’s overflowing,
Kept me in my life serene ere fell this rain.

My name was Ciacco in your town’s way of knowing:
Gluttony was the damning guilt that sent
Me, as thou seest, to where this storm is blowing.

And not alone this mine wick’d soul ’s so bent,
Nay, all of these the same torments await
For the same sin”. And then his voice was spent.

I answer’d: “Ciacco, thy most painful fate
Weighs on me so, that I feel mov’d to cry;
But what more, there in our divided state,
Shall - dost thou know? - my citizens decry?
Is there any just man? And what ’s the cause
That such dissension should my city try?”

Said he: “After contending without pause
They ’ll come to blood, and then the peasant side
With great offense shall chase all bent to oppose.

Then the victors behoves be left to ride
For three suns only, and th’others to overcome
Aided by man who seems his time to bide.

They ’ll rule with haughty front, and not for some
Short time, weighing the losers with sad yoke,
Not caring what complaints, or tears, may come.

Two just men there are count’d, whose voice is broke;
Avarice, envy and pride are three live embers
Thy townsmen’ hearts ever intent to stoke”.

Here were muted his tearful-voiced members.
And I: “Still ask I thee to teach me more,
If gift of a few words can leave these chambers.

Farinata and Tegghiaio, worthy of much store,
Jacopo Rusticucci, Arrigo and then
Mosca and all those who put their wit up fore,

Pray, tell me where are such renowned men,
‘Cause warm desire I feel to get to know
If Heaven sweet or bitter Hell ’s their den”.

“Among the blackest” said “dwell they down low;
Several sins weigh them near Hell’s cold floor;
If thou get there, thou ’ll see their wretched row.

But when of the sweet world thou ’ll find the door,
Pray bring me to the mind of those who live;
No longer shall I speak, nor answer more”.

To his straight gaze a squint he seem’d to give;
He thus look’d at me briefly, and bow’d his head;
He fell with those who light never perceive.

My leader then told me: “Now from this bed
He ’ll not rise till the angelic trump shall sound,
When the inimical power hither ’s led.

Each one shall then see again his burial mound,
Taking up his old flesh and his old form,
To hear what rumbles in aeons without bound”.

Thus we trespassed the foul blend of storm
And souls, proceeding with unhurried gait,
Touching a little upon future life’s norm;

So I ask’d: “Master mine, what is the fate
Of these pains, when the great sentence is told?
Shall they grow, stay unchang’d, or else abate?”

And he: “Go back to knowledge firm and old,
Which holds, the more perfection is approach’d,
The more content and grief can feel the mould.

Although these damned souls never are vouch’d
True perfection to reach, yet on that day
More by dint of that state shall they be touch’d”.

We turned round and round the circle’s way,
Discoursing a lot more than I can tell,
Until we came on to the next stairway:
Here we met Pluto, enemy ward of Hell.
Seventh Chant

“Papey”, with clucking voice Pluto began,
“Papey Satan Aleph!” Dark words, at which
That gentle sage, whose knowledge so far ran,

Comfort’d me thus: “Hold to less harmful pitch
Thy fears: his powers, wide as this fiend hath,
Shall not keep us from stepping down this ditch”.

Then to those swollen lips across our path:
“In hold, accursed wolf, thy tongue be let:
Be consumed within with all thy wrath!

Not without cause to the bleak world we get:
Thus is it will’d up there, where Michael bold
Aveng’d the proud rebellion of thy set”.

As sails once taut by wind’s powerful hold
Sag down entangled, when the mast gives way,
The cruel beast thus sank to earth, beat cold.

We now descend where the fourth circle lay,
Gaining more ground down that most sorry slope
That all world’s evil gulps and packs away.

O God’s justice! Such agony to mope
About! So many pains and new chastise
Who can gather? How with our guilts to cope?

As waves over Charybdis break and rise
When in their spin they clash, and high resound,
So ring-a-ring the ranks of wretch’d unwise.

Larger than ever crowds, beyond all bound,
I there saw, from both sides with loudest shouts
To turn weights with their breast, milling around.

Two flocks against each other came to bouts:
Each then retrac’d its steps, reverting way;
“Why keepst thou?” and “Why waste thou?” scream’d the louts.

Thus from both sides they came and went away
Along the dismal circle, to a new meet,
Shouting again the offending verse and fey;

Then each crowd turn’d the never-rested feet
To track its own half-circle to a new fight.
And I, near touch’d to my heart’s very seat,

Said: “Master mine, shed now for me some light
On their quality, and tell if all were priests
Those tonsur’d men who seem to shun our right”.
“In all of them” said he, “their mind so lists,  
That in their former life they fail’d to make  
Measur’d use of what wealth came to their fists.

This meaning clear canst thou from their barks take  
When to the two contrary points they come  
Where a contrary guilt splits either wake.

Clerks were all those, who are seen without some  
Hair on their heads, and cardinals and popes  
Whom avarice is wont more to overcome”.

“Master”, said I, “in the crowd without hopes  
Methinks could I some of them recognize  
Who were filthy of the guilt with which each copes”.

And he: “Vain thoughts inside thy mind now rise:  
The uncaring life that made them soil’d with blame  
Now their appearance hides as in disguise.

Ever to the twin clash they ’ll lead their shame:  
Some shall rise from their tomb with closed fist  
And some with cut-off hair, of wasteful fame.

Badly to give and keep deprived this list  
Of the world’s bliss, and sent them to this fight:  
Fairer words shan’t I waste to give its gist.

Now, son, canst thou well see the scornful plight  
Of all goods that to Fortune are committed,  
For which quarrels mankind in wrong and right;

Indeed, all gold under the Moon admitted  
Now and forever, of these tired shades  
Not one from their bad thirst could make remitted”.

“Master”, I ask’d, “what are substance and grades  
Of this Fortune thou mention in thy say,  
That in her grasp world’s goods so freely trades?”

“Silly creatures”, he counter’d, “in whose way  
So great ignorance right judgment impedes!  
As thy food shall I now true sentence lay.

He whose knowledge all finite bound exceeds  
Made heavens and gave them guidance, to make  
That each part to all parts its brightness leads,

And each part shall of light equal part take:  
In like way to the world’s splendours He gave  
A general minister, guide and brake

To transpose in due time all wealth, that have  
Amass’d the clans, from lane to another lane,
Beyond reach of man's wit, be fool or brave;

Thus a nation shall wax and th'o'er wane,
According to the judgment of her wit,
Which is hidden as snake in bush of cane.

Your knowledge has no power against it,
For she cares, judges and pursues her ends
In her kingdom, as in his each god sees fit.

In her exchange she never stays her hands:
Necessity goads her to unceasing speed;
Often man's fate to sudden change, thus, bends.

Such is Fortune, of whom oft curse the deed
Even those who should give her work due praise,
Putting her to undeserv'd blame in their creed;

But she's immers'd in bliss, above things base;
With all other prime powers, happy in mind
She spins her sphere and gladly weaves her maze.

Now to greater compassion must we grind:
Every star sinks down that start'd to rise
When I left; not to linger I 'm in bind".

We cut across the circle's radial size,
To the inner rim, over a bubbling source
Which into a moat then flows, waterfall-wise.

Darker than dark was its infernal course;
And we, following water's way, drop low
Through that difficult path now had perforce.

Styx is named the dismal swamp, where flow
That wretched brook's black currents, when they reach
Of the malignant cliff the livid toe.

And I, who stared across the forlorn beach,
Saw muddy folks stuck up in that quagmire,
All nak'd, angry in their semblance one and each.

They were striking each other with great ire,
Not with hands only, but with head and breast
And foot, rending their limbs with biting dire.

"Son", said the Master, "thou art not hard press'd
To see these are the souls with anger won;
And with this other truth thou should be impress'd,

That more submerged souls are sighing on,
For which the water seems above to bubble,
As on all sides thy gaze can glean anon.
Stuck in the mud, they say: «We harbour’d trouble
In the sweet air that from the Sun takes cheer,
Carrying as seething smoke our slothful double;

Now we are griev’d in the black slime down here».
This rigmarole they gurgle in their throat,
Since they cannot spell it with wording clear”.

So we circled, around the filthy moat,
A longish arc betwixt wet ground and dry,
Turning our eyes to those whom bleak muds bloat;

We came at last where a tower stands high.
Eighth Chant

I say, proceeding on, that long before
At the foot of the high tower we came,
Our eyes up to its top went, all the more

That there we saw one and another flame,
And a third nod in answer from a space
So far removed, hardly we could it frame.

To that ocean of knowledge, Virgil's face,
I turn'd: "Master, what does this signal mean?
And what answer conveys that second trace?

And who are those that made them all?" My dean
Then: "On the dirty waves thy eye may see
Who waits, if from the swamp's vapour be clean".

Fleet arrow never was observ'd by me
Leave the bowstring as fast, flying through the air,
As a small boat I saw the shore to flee,

Through the water to us coming down there,
Without a crew, but by one helmsman steer'd,
Shouting: "Wick'd soul, at last thou reach this lair!"

"Flegiās, all too early thou hast cheer'd",
Said my lord, "and in vain at us thou scream:
Thou shall have us but on the fiord thou clear'd".

As do those who from some deceptive dream
Wake up, and their regret have to repress,
So did Flegiās' own anger boil and steam.

My leader board'd the boat, and not the less
Did it float up; nay, it seem'd to gain draught
Only when on its hold he made me ingress.

As soon as we had enter'd, th'ancient aft
Left the shore, cleaving deeper liquid wake
Than it 's wont when but shades are on such craft.

While through that stagnant pond our way we make,
I see one full of mud to face me, saying:
"Who art thou, who too early cross this lake?"

Say I to him: "For coming, I'm not staying:
But who art thou, so soil'd all o'er with slime?"
"Seest thou not? One" says he "who tears is laying."

I counter'd then: "To mourn in tears and grime,
Accursed spirit, keep thy dark abode:
I know thee, dirty as this, from bygone time".
Both hands to the boat’s side he then bestrode;  
But him away the cunning master drove,  
Saying: “Off, thou cur, with those who like thee strode!”  

Then his arms round my neck he clasp’d with love,  
Kissing my face, and said: “Disdainful soul,  
Bless’d she who thee conceiv’d on earth above!  

This in the world with haughty pride was foul;  
No good quality shall his fame adorn:  
Thus is here mad with rage this fiendish ghoul.  

Many an exalted king up there was born,  
Who here shall be confin’d as pig in cruds,  
Leaving memory of any good deed shorn!”  

And I: “Lord, to see him dive in these muds  
A cheerful sight would be, worthy of my thank,  
Ere we leave of this lake the filthy suds”.  

Said he to me: “Ere the far-sided bank  
In full view comes, thy wish shall have been grant’d:  
Thou shall have seen how this sour slime he drank”.  

In a short while those muddy folks had rant’d  
Against him, maiming him with fury, and I  
For that to God praise in my conscience chant’d.  

“Down with Filippo Argenti!” was the outcry;  
And the wild-spirit’d Florentine so doom’d  
Onto himself his own teeth turn’d, gnawing by.  

No more of him, left where perennial loom’d  
His pain; now I push forward intent gaze,  
For a lament that in my ears loud boom’d.  

Said Virgil: “Son, now comes near through this haze  
The city named Dis, with sorely bent  
Citizens, with large hosts of devils base”.  

And I: “Its mosques in the valley high-pent  
In the distance already I see for sure,  
Vermilion red as if just out were sent  
Of fire”. And he: “Perennial flames endure  
Those walls inside, so they take fiery coat,  
In this low Hell, as thee thy eyes assure”.  

We arriv’d at last inside the deep low moat  
Fencing in that infernal forlorn ground;  
The walls of stoutest iron seemed wrought.

Not without a great turn making all round,  
We came to a site where loud our helmsman shout’d:
“Here’s the entrance: get off!” with angry sound.

More than a thousand there, from Heavens out’d,
Saw I on the doors stand, who with disdain
Were saying: “Who is this, by death unrout’d

Coming to roam of dead folks the domain?”
And my wise master signs to them imparted
To ask with them apart be let to explain.

Then the high pique from them somewhat departed,
And: “Thou alone” they said, “come in, and leave
Him go who such mad journey rashly started.

Let him alone his way back try to weave,
If he can; and thou here, instead, remain
Who through dark land help’d him his course to heave.”

Think, reader, whether I felt overlain
With terror, hearing such accursed speech,
For I thought safe return I’d never gain.

“O dear leader of mine, I thee beseech,
Who seven or more times made me unafraid
And always kept me away from danger’s reach,

Pray”, said I, “do not leave me so dismay’d;
And the way back let us together trace,
Since further to proceed is here naysaid.”

And that lord who thus far had led my pace
Said: “Don’t be afraid, ‘cause our steps to impede
No one may: such is He who grant’d His grace.

Nay, wait me here, and thy frighten’d soul feed
And comfort with a stalwart meal of hope:
In this low world shall not I leave thee in need.”

Thus the sweet father goes, and I’ve to cope
Alone with my suspended thoughts and fears,
For in my mind are battling faith with mope.

Of what they said I remain’d in arrears,
But he was not long time with them detain’d,
Ere each within the walls with great haste steers.

The doors to my lord’s face were shut and chain’d
By those fiends, and he was from entry barred,
And thus returned with slow gait and strain’d.

He walk’d with downcast gaze, and with look marred
By dejection, and between deep sighs was saying:
“Lo! Who access to the sorry abodes here sparrowed!”
To me said then: “Thou shouldn't, for my straying,
Be dismay'd, for I shall truly overcome
This trial, for defense they may be laying.

These fiends' arrogance yet was us'd on some
Past time, on door less secret that they tried
To bar, and still unlock'd is in outcome.

Above it the dire warning to the died
Saw thou writ; and from there descends already,
Unescorted to pass the place denied,

One who shall make our way open and ready.
Ninth Chant

That hue in which my face was paint'd outside,
When my leader I saw return, from fear,
Caus'd his own sooner to be drawn inside.

Intent he paus'd as man who tries to hear;
For the eye could, indeed, not carry afar
'Cause black air and thick fog were extant here.

“We 'll have, though, to prevail over their bar,
Or else...” he then began, “...Such to me bid:
How seems delay'd the one sent from fair star!”

I well perceiv'd how his first words were hid
By the others which were by him then said,
Which on the former ones tried to put lid;

And nonetheless his speech had made me afraid,
'Cause I took his cut-off sentence to follow
A worse intent, maybe, than he had laid.

“To this low region of the dismal hollow
Does ever anyone come from first grade,
Of those who in mere lame hope have there to wallow?”

This question to my leader I then made,
And he: “Seldom” replied “it ever chanc'd
Any of us took the road my sender bade.

‘Tis true that one more time I here advanc'd,
Conjur'd up by the fierce Eriton, fit
To evoke the shades, to have her spells enhanc'd.

Since a short time my soul from flesh was split,
When she sent me within that burning wall,
To fetch a ghost from Judas' cursed pit.

That is the bottommost and darkest hall,
Farthest remov'd from the all-spinning sphere:
Well do I know the way; don't worry at all.

This swamp, that stink so heavy gives off here,
All round girdles the city full of pain,
Where but force our ingress by now shall clear.”

And more he said, which I did not retain,
'Cause all attention by the sight was caught
That at the burning tower's top was plain.

All of a sudden rose there straight to onslaught
Three hellish furies caked with bloody dirt,
With female limbs, in posture all distraught,
Who with most verdant hydras seem'd all girt;
Tiny snakes and cerastes were their mane,
Which round their fierce foreheads made feral skirt.

And Virgil, recognizing those arcane
Maids of the queen of everlasting tears,
“Look” says “the Erinyes with mad fury insane:

Megaera is she who at left hand appears;
Alecto 's on the right weeping along;
Ctesyphon 's third”; and here his speech off clears.

They were cleaving their breasts with nails, and strong
Themselves were beating with their palms, and scream'd
So high, I near'd my poet fearing wrong.

“Come here Medusa: her gaze on him once beam'd”
All said, looking below, “he 'll turn to rock:
Wrongly Theseus' offence was not redeem'd.”

“Turn backward and thy sight be sure to block;
For if the Gorgon shews and thou look on,
No hope is left ever to reach safe dock.”

Thus spake my master; nay, by himself thereon
He turn'd me away, and my hands did not trust,
'Cause with his own he clos'd my gaze anon.

Hear with sane wit this tale, reader, thou must;
Look at the doctrine that lay here conceal'd
Of this mysterious verse under the crust.

And already on the muddy waves there peal'd
A thundering uproar of fearful sound,
From which both banks with fiercest shaking reel'd,

Not otherwise produced than on ground
Does wind impetuous for competing heats,
When, against the wood struggling, blows unbound
The branches tearing out, which down it beats;
Pushing in front stupendous clouds of dust,
Chases shepherds and beasts from their retreats.

My eyes freed, Virgil said: “Now raise thou must
Thy sight's aim to that ancient foamy plain
On the side where the smoke makes thicker crust”.

As all frogs swim in flight, not to be slain,
In front of the inimical water-snake,
Until each squats like a small mound of grain,

So I discerned in that viscid lake
Countless souls put to flight in front of one
Who with dry soles fording of Styx would make.

From his face wiped he the greasy run
Of the black air, the left hand often flailing;
And merely such nuisance seemed to shun.

Well did I know from Heavens he was hailing,
And to my master turned, who then bode
To be quiet and to make curtsey unfailing.

O, how full of disdain his gait there strode!
To the door stood he firm and, rod in hand,
Easily unlock'd the vainly shut abode.

"O from Heavens outcast spiteful band,"
Began he, the horrid threshold wide bestriding,
"Whence such arrogance takes in ye proud stand?

Why stubbornly refuse to obey the biding
Whose course shall never suffer block or dam,
And which not a few times gave ye sour tiding?

To what avail 'gainst destiny to ram?
Cerberus, if your memory be sound,
To this day bears shav'd chin from old bedlam."

Then he retrac'd his steps through filthy ground,
Nor spake a word to us, wearing the dress
Of man to other cares intent and bound

Than what in front of him the day did press;
And we moved our feet toward the enclos'd,
After the holy words grant'd safe ingress.

We enter'd there without being oppos'd,
And I, who felt a strong desire to look
At all circumstance such a fortress clos'd,

As soon inside, around a keen gaze took:
On ev'ry hand saw I a wide-strewn town
Full of torment and pain in ev'ry nook.

As at Arles, where the Rhone river bogs down,
Or at Pola, near where Carnaro waves
Wet Italy's frontiers and its end crown,

The landscape is made varied by the graves,
Thus here from ev'ry side were tombs in sight,
But bitterer by far to entombed knaves:

'Cause in between sepulchres fires alight
Made their walls incandescent, in such way
That heating us'd by smiths would seem more slight.
All the lids on the above suspended lay,
And out of them so dire a moaning came
As from offended souls is heard to stray.

And I: “Master, who are and by what name
Are known the folks in these hot graves constrain’d,
Who seem with such hard sighs regret their blame?”

And he: “Here heresiarchs are found detain’d
With followers of all sects, and yet more
Then thou may think are in the tombs contain’d.

Like with like is entomb’d, variously sore,
As more or lesser heat each tomb imparts.”
Then, to the right-hand side longing the shore,

We pass’d between hot tombs and high ramparts.
Along a secret path my master goes
Now, and behind his shoulders I keep pace,
Between the city's wall and the dire throes.

"O peak of virtue, who our steering trace
Through all these sinful circles at thy will,
Speak to me, to my wishes granting grace.

The folks who inside all of these tombs lie still
Could I see? Truly is wide open each lid
And no one 's standing guard to bar their sill".

And he: "All those tombstones that raised did
Stand, shall be shut when with their bodies come
The sinners from Jehoshaphat's harsh grid.

This part has a cemetery become
For Epicurus and all who, like him,
Hold that souls share with bodies death's outcome.

Anyway answer promptly to thy whim
Shall be given, both what thy words express'd
And what unsaid remain'd at thy speech's brim."

And I: "Good leader, never I repress'd
Of my heart aught, if not less bore to inspire,
And not just now hast thou such leaning stress'd".

"O Tuscan man, who through the city of fire
Alive pass, and whose earnest words endear,
Be pleas'd to stop awhile beside this pyre.

Thy very tongue makes thee plainly, in mine ear,
Native of that ancestral noble ground
Toward which I too molest was, I fear".

Across the air suddenly came this sound
From a sepulchre, so closer I drew
To Virgil, fearing what might lie around.

And he told me: "Turn back: why now to eschew
Meeting with Farinata who there rose?
From his waist up thou shalt be grant'd his view."

Already had I planted my gaze in those
Fierce eyes of his; he stood with erect chest
And forehead, full of spite for Hell's harsh close.

And my leader's bold hands and brisk then press'd
Me to him through the burial grounds with speed,
While he said: "Be with care thy words address'd".
As I came near his tomb and he took heed,
He looked shortly at me, and with some scorn
Then ask’d of me: “What was thy fathers’ seed?”

I concealed him not whence I was born,
Being all willing to answer his quest;
For which he arch’d his brows as if ill-worn,

Then said: “Fiercely thy forebears address’d
Themselves against my own, me and my side,
So that twice they were chas’d at my behest”.

“In exile they did not for long abide,
Nay, they return’d both times” said I; “this art,
Though, yours learnt not to apply with equal pride.”

Then from the uncover’d tomb shew’d up in part,
Along the first, one more soul down to his chin;
Methinks he knelt, as if to rise would start.

He look’d around me, seeming to take in
Whether with me someone else he could find;
And after this suspicion he must win,

Crying he asked: “If throughout this blind
Dungeon for thy high talent thou art let,
Why is my son not with thee keeping bind?”

And I to him: “Alone I did not get
Here: one waits upon me, whom in life sweet
Thy Guido with disdain perchance had met”.

His words and his pain’s manner made me neat
Already about his name; ‘tis was why
So fully did my answer come, and fleet.

Suddenly rising, he cried out: “Did I
Hear thee well? ‘He had met’, thou said? No more
Does he live? Does not light cheer up his eye?”

When he perceiv’d that I made pause before
Answering, the poor soul fell down in there
On his back, and his face shew’d nevermore.

But that other high-hearted man whose fair
Quest I had heeded, did not change his look,
Nor bent his neck, nor even mov’d a hair;

Nay, making sequel to the turn that took
The first words, “Worse than this hot bed I feel”,
Said he, “that such an art my kin forsook.

But fifty times shall hardly unveil and seal
Her face the woman who in Hell holds sway,
Ere thou learn that such art is heavy as steel.

And, might thou find the sweet world’s arduous way,
Tell me: how comes that people is so fierce
Against my kin in all the laws they lay?

Thus I replied: “The slaughters that still pierce
Our hearts and taint’d the Arbia in bloody red
Such proposals incite from the town’s peers”.

He then shook aught his head, a deep sigh shed,
And said: “Not I alone was in that deed,
Nor without a good cause was I there led.

But alone there I was, where hate and greed
Would make all suffer Florence to be slain,
Who face to face defended her in need.”

“Might your seed hence have future fair and fain;”
Said I, “pray, solve to me that dubious knot
That many thoughts entangled in my brain.

It seems you see, if true meaning I got,
Beforehand what the course of time shall write,
And all the present things you discern not.”

“We can see, as the man who has long sight,
Things” he said “that the distant future span;
That much still shines to us the Leader’s might.

When things are near or extant, put in ban
Is our insight, if by others not fed
Are the news on the current life of Man.

Thus thou can understand how wholly dead
Our knowledge shall become, after that point
When from its source the flow of time is shed.”

Then, as pricked from guilt my words had coin’d,
Said I: “Therefore tell, pray, that fallen shade
His son is still with the live world conjoin’d;

And if just now my answer was delay’d,
Let him know how the cause was that its track
Was block’d by the hard doubt by now allay’d”.

Already was my master calling back
Me; so in haste I asked: “Still, I pray,
Tell me who here with you is on the rack”.

“More than one thousand here together stay:
The second Frederick is found inside,
And the Cardinal; more ‘s not fit to say”.

44
While I turn to my poet, down to hide
Lies that soul; and my thoughts are all intent
To his words, that bad portents seem to abide.

The ancient poet mov'd on; and as he went
He asked: “Why art thou so much dismay'd?”
And I to my misgivings then gave vent.

“Keep in thy mind what against thee is said”,
Told me the leader wise, and rais'd his right:
“And to these words full attention be paid:

When thou shalt be in front of that sweet light
Of her whose shining eyes all things embrace,
She will give thee of thy life's course full sight.”

Then to the left-hand side he turns his pace:
We leave the wall and to the centre grind,
Through the path which to a valley bends its trace,

Whence an offending stink seems now to wind.
Eleventh Chant

Upon the foremost brink of high cliff, lain
By immense broken rocks all round dispos’d,
We came above more cruel heap of pain;
And here awful excess at once impos’d
On us of stink thrown up by that dark pit;
So we retreat’d some steps, near a tomb clos’d
By a lid on which hewn I saw a writ,
Saying: “Anastasius pope herein I hold,
Whose path from straight was by Photinus split”.

“Our way down to delay some time” then told
To me my master “I deem now is fit,
Toward this stink our senses to make bold,
Fearing it then no more”. And I: “This bit
Of time should not idle be wast’d” replied;
“Find then some use.” “I ’m looking, see, for it”.
“Son mine, these boulders gird on their inside”,
He then began “three lower grades in round,
Smaller and smaller down than those we plied.
Full of accursed spirits all are found;
And so that later but thy sight be enough,
Learn how and for what cause those are there bound.
Malicious acts, by Heavens met with tough
Hate, have injurious end, and any such
With either force or fraud on some is rough.
But since is fraud man’s proper ill, that much
More God offends; and thus the lowest site
Hold the defrauders, whom greater pains touch.
Of those sinning in violence by right
Is the first grade; but in three circles lies
Compartment’d, for in three persons can hit spite.
Against God, or the self, or neighbour tries
Force to overcome, in them or in their things,
As thou shalt hear with words bereft of lies.
Brute force with death and painful wounds oft stings
The neighbour, and often to his goods as well
Damage from fire, theft and destruction clings;
Malicious wounders, those who bring death’s knell,
Arsonists, looters, by their sins array’d
Under first circle’s pains serve endless spell.
By his own deed man’s goods can then be laid.
Waste, or his life be slain; therefore repented
Uselessly, in the second circle, is well said 14

Be whoever to enjoy our world prevented
Himself, or lost his wealth in gambling blind,
Or wept while joy to him sweet life had granted. 15

Violence against God is the third kind,
To curse Him, or deny Him in deep heart,
Or of nature His gifts despise in mind, 16

So that the least of circles is the part
Which with its seal marks Sodom and Cahors,
And those despising God in their thoughts' start. 17

Fraud, which every soul by right abhors,
Can be wrought against trusting man, by lie,
Or against some who trust does not endorse. 18

This latter kind severs merely the tie
Of love to which is man by nature bound;
Within the second grade, therefore, lie 19

Dissembler, flatterer, he who casts around
Spells, counterfeiter, thief, simoniac priest,
Panderer, briber and all like foul mound. 20

By fraud's first kind that love is made surceas'd
That comes from nature, and love that later grows,
Through which a special faith is to man leas'd; 21

Thus in the bottom grade, whose center shows
The world's point on which Lucifer sits,
All who betray suffer eternal woes.” 22

And I: "Master, thy speech most clearly fits
To reason, and admirably comparts
This abyss and the folks in yonder pits. 23

But tell me: those in the marsh muddy parts,
Those by wind toss'd, and those pound'd by rain,
And those still whom harsh tongue hits with its darts, 24

Why are they not within the red domain
Of Dis punish'd, if them dooms Heaven's ire?
And if not, why are they put to such pain?” 25

Answer'd he: “Why now such delirious fire
Makes thy wit from its used sharpness stray?
Or does thy mind don other thoughts' attire? 26

Does not in front of thee memory lay
Those words with which thy Ethics deals about
The three inclinations to which God says nay,
Incontinence with malice and all bout
Of beastly madness? and lack of restraint
How less is blam'd and less does God's law flout?

If thou look deep into this rule, and paint
In thy mind who are those in higher grades
Out there, sustaining penance for their taint,

Thou shalt soon see why from the worse comrades
They are divid'd, and why less vex'd by far
Divine justice is hammering their glades.”

“O thou healing any troubled sight bright star,
Thou make me happy so when truth unfold,
That to doubt is with knowledge's pleasure par.

Let thy mind on past thoughts again take hold”
Said I, “when thou affirm'd usury offends
Divine goodness; why so, thou left untold.”

“In philosophy” he answer'd “he who intends
Shall find open remark in many a place
How nature always in her doings tends
To stem from divine mind and its fair trace;
And if thy Physics thou well read, thou 'll see,
Ere thou proceed in it some not long space,

How your art stems from nature's way to be,
As in the master's step scholars must fall;
So your art God's granddaughter looks to me.

From art and nature, if thou should recall
The Genesis beginning, it is fit
Their life and their progress should take folks all;

But moneylender's path from this has split,
So that nature itself and her offspring
He despises, by different hope lit.

But let us move at last, 'cause ripe 's the thing;
Above horizon now the Pisces swim,
The Plough stars under them the Mistral sling,

And yonder there the cliff slopes off the rim.”
Alpine in look, and horrid to our stare,
Also for what therein contained lay,
Is the place where we now downhill go dare.

As looks the big landslide, on Trento’s way,
Which hit Adige’s bank, by ruinous blow
Of earthquake, or base yielding, as it may,

- Where from the mountain top, whence it fell low,
To the plain, is the rock so uneven hewn,
Some path could shew to those looking below -,

Thus our way down was in that ravine shewn;
And on the broken boulders round the grade
We saw the ancient shame of Crete lay strewn,

Whose begetting in wooden cow was made;
And he bit on himself at our first sight,
As inner anger oft frenzied beings bade.

My wise leader to him shouted: “By right
Thinkest thou Athen’s duke is here again,
Who in the upper world slew thee in fair fight?

Go away, thou beast: this man is seeking gain
From knowledge of chastise that here is dealt,
Not by dint of thy sister’s helping skein”.

As is the bull which mortal blow has felt,
That cannot flee, but staggers here and there,
And breaks at last, in its death throes, its belt,

Such was the Minotaur then in our stare;
And my wise mentor shouted: “Pass the gate:
While he rages on, go down is fit to dare”.

Thus that uneven slope we did not wait
To take; its stones oft shifted underfoot
Where I was treading, from the unused weight.

I went on thinking, and said Virgil: “Moot
Is in thy mind how and why fell this slide
Guarded by him so in anger fast to shoot.

Thou hast to know that the first time this side
Of low Hell I descended, the upset mound
Of this rock had not yet begun to glide.

But not long ere the time at last came round
That here should tread He who the prized prey
Sav’d from Dis that in upper grade He found,
From all sides the deep valley tint’d in grey
So strongly shook, I thought the world had felt
That love which some allege many times may

Have caus’d all things into chaos to melt;
And such a blow this old rock could not stand,
And here and elsewhere fell and thus dwelt.

But down there aim thy sight, for close at hand
Is the river of blood, where ever boil
Those who against others took violent stand.”

O blind greed and mad anger, which make toil
Us mortals in our life, all its short span,
And for all aeons us so badly soil!

I saw there a wide ditch bent in round plan,
For it girds in a circle all that space,
As my escort had told me; and there ran,

In a long file, between ditch and cliff face,
Many Centaurs with arrows arm’d and bow,
As in the world they hunt’d on their preys’ trace.

But all of them stood still, as soon as low
Down the slope they saw us descend; and three,
Ready to shoot, left their ranks in a row;

And one shout’d from afar: “The pain to be
By ye sustain’d, declare from where ye stand,
Ye two down bent, or my arrows shall flee.”

Said my master: “Our answer shall we hand
To Chiron over there, when near we come;
Thy will ever too ready is to command”.

And then: “Nessus is this” said, nudging some
Me in the ribs, “who for fair Deianira died,
And of his own late vengeance set the outcome.

And in the middle he, whose gaze is tied
Down his chest, Chiron is, who Achilles rais’d;
Third is Pholos, by anger ever tried.

Around the ditch by thousands they are bas’d,
To shoot the souls that more emerge would dare,
From the blood stream, than them their guilt has cas’d.”

Near to those slender beasts we came, and there
Chiron, taking an arrow, with its tail
Pushed beard back from chin, with pensive care.

When the great mouth was free, and open trail
Had his words, to his mates “The one in back”,

50
Said he “moves what he touches; did ye fail
To see? Dead people's feet tread lighter track.”
And Virgil, facing him at his chest's height,
Where horse figure takes up, and man's looks slack,

Answer'd: “He 's alive by right: alone his fate
Demands I lead him on through this dark fief:
Necessity, not fancy, drives our gait.

He did not steal in life, nor was I thief:
Hallelujah a saint soul ceased to say,
To send me on new mission of relief.

But for that power thanks to which I may
Move my steps through this wild land of the dead,
Give us one of thy mates, to show the way
Where we can ford this river's bloody bed,
And to carry this man, for he can walk,
But he 's no spirit who can fly instead."

Chiron turn'd to his right, and held this talk
With Nessus: “Trace thy way back, and them lead,
And make give way those ranks that them should balk”.

Then, thus safely escorted, we made speed
Along the shore of ruddy boiling flow,
Where each boiled scream'd out for some foul deed.

I saw folks there submerg'd up to their brow,
And the great Centaur said: “Tyrants are those,
Who blood or wealth of others held for low.

Merciless slaughters here lament'd arose
From Alexander, and Dionysus fierce,
For whom Sicily toil'd without repose

So many suns. And he who only appears
With his black hair, is Azzolino; his mate
Is blond Opizzo of Este, who, one hears,

By the hand of his stepson met his fate
Up in the world.” To Virgil then I turn'd,
Who said: “His word be first where mine is late”.

The Centaur further on shew'd folks that burn'd
Immers'd up to their throat in that hot flow
Whose currents like the Bulicame churn'd.

“That shade that all alone standing I show”
Said Nessus “stabb'd in church the heart that still
On Thames' shore is rever'd in golden glow”. 
I saw next folks free of the current till
Not only head and neck, but all the chest;
And many of these could I have nam'd at will.

Lower and lower, thus, became depress'd
The blood pool, till the feet only would cook;
And hence the way to ford for us was best.

“As to this side shallower bottom took
The boiling flow” said Nessus “as thou saw,
Thou can trust me that opposite its look

Appears on the other side, following law
Of ever growing depth, until it joins
The part where tyrants suffer greatest draw.

Here divine justice sharp chastises coins
For Attila, the scourge of earthy kings,
For Pyrrhus, Sextus; and ever purloins

The bitter tears that boiling heat out wrings
From Rainier of Corneto and Rainier Fool,
Who waged war on roads with bloody stings.”

He turn'd back then, and cross'd again the pool.
Not yet had Nessus reached yonder shore,
When our way was set to cross some thickets
Not marked by any path through their wild core.

Foliage not green, but dark, the eye there picks;
No straight branch, but gnarled all with knags;
No fruits are there, but bare poisoned sticks.

In rougher scrubs don’t dwell, or thicker snags,
Those wildest beasts that loathe the tilled fields
Between Corneto and Cecina’s harsh crags.

Here many an ugly Harpy her foul nest builds;
Ill-boding from those same was said to chase
From Strophades the Trojans of stout shields.

Wide wings they have, and human neck and face,
Big bellies clad with feathers, clawed feet;
Moanings let out on those strange trees their race.

Then the master: “Ere these new things thou meet,
That thou art in the second circle know”,
Began to say, “and here shall be thy seat
Till thou come to horrid sands one rung more low:
Therefore look out with care, and thou shalt see
Things that beyond belief thy mind shall throw.”

Moaning was heard on every part by me,
But no one was in sight venting such grief;
I stood, nor more astonished could I be.

Methinks he thought I held in my belief
The voices to come out of those dry scrubs
From people hiding in that dismal fief;

Then said Virgil: “If from one of these stubs
Thou break off a small twig, in that same point
Thy thoughts shall meet with unexpected rubs”.

Thus to one of the trees my hand I join’d,
And from a thorny branch tore a small spray;
And its trunk shouted then: “Why break my joint?”

After red blood had seep’d over its gray,
Again it ask’d: “Why art thou thus rending
My limbs? No pity at all thy soul feel may?

Men we were; into stumps here us are sending
The high powers: well should thy hand us show
More pity, if souls of snakes would here be wending.”
As a green log when burning with flame low
At one end, from far end leaking out dew,
Hisses for wind and moisture that out flow,

In the same way from the torn twig off flew
Words together with blood; so I let the spray
Fall down, in poise of men who dread eschew.

“If this man could have trust’d the truth that lay
In my rhyme,” said the sage “o wretched shade,
Without taking experience’s hard way,

He would never on thee his hand have laid;
But induce him to do such nasty deed
Me, yet unwilling, this unheard thing has made.

But now tell him thyself what is thy seed,
That, in place of amends, he can ensure
Thy fame up in the world, when he ‘ll be freed.”

And the tree: “So thy words do sweetly allure,
That I cannot be silent; don’t be aggriev’d
That I somewhat with my sad tale endure.

I was he who long time both keys receiv’d
Of high Frederick’s heart, and them so turn’d
With sweet manner, to aggrieve or make reliev’d,

That from his faith all others nearly he spurn’d;
To my exhalted office I kept true,
To the point that my sleep and health there burn’d.

The whoresome envy that devoid of rue
Never from Caesar’s house took off her gaze,
That common deadly sin in all courts due,

Against me enflamed all the courtiers base;
And the enflamed so enflam’d the King, that fast
To sorry grief turned the sweetest praise.

My soul in such disdainful mood was cast,
That, thinking death would make me escape disdain,
‘Gainst my just self unjust made me at last.

Upon these unheard roots in which I ‘ve lain,
I swear I broke faith never to my lord,
Whose high honour deserved all my strain.

And, should fair fates to one of ye afford
To regain the sweet world, mend my repute
From blemish suffer’d ever since envy soar’d”.

My poet wait’d a little, then: “Since mute
Is his voice,” said, “don’t waste this precious time;
Nay, speak, and ask the questions most thee suit."

Then I to him: "What thou think best may rhyme
With my intent, ask him thyself, I pray:
For I could not, so much I pity his crime!"

Therefore he recommenced: "If he may
Freely accomplish thy will just now express'd,
Shackled soul, be now pleas'd to tell the way

The spirits in these stumps are here compress'd;
And, more, tell us, if ever 'tis consented,
Whether any from such limbs gets undress'd"

Then a powerful breath the trunk out vented,
And this wind into words turned at last:
"Brief answer shall to ye now be presented.

Soon as the cruel soul outside is cast
From the body whence has itself divest'd,
Minos to seventh circle sends it fast.

In this wood falls, and without choice is nest'd;
But where it's hurl'd by chance, there it sprouts root
As spelt grain, and its growth proceeds unrest'd,

First as small weed and then as sylvan shoot;
On its black leaves the Harpies, taking food,
Make wounds, through which we can bewail their loot.

As the other souls we shall, out of this wood,
Seek out our bodies, but them shall not wear,
For what man took away, get back 's not good.

Here once dragged, throughout the forest bare
Hung to the trunks our bodies shall abide,
Each on the thorns of his arboreal snare."

We were still paying heed near to its side,
Thinking more the bleak trunk wanted to tell,
When a noise startled of our thoughts the ride,

In the way that the hunter hears the yell
Of the boar, and the pack of hounds in wait,
The fronds rustling, the pursuit's fury and knell.

And lo!, two shades on our left, prostrate,
Nak'd and scratched, are seen to run so fast,
That the wood's branches tear down at furious rate.

The first screams: "Death, come to me at last!"
And th'other, thinking he 's too slow behind,
Shouts then at him: "Lano, fleet legs thou hast!"
At Toppo jousts they were not of like kind!
And, since perhaps his strength is all but spent,
All enmesh'd with a bush to a stop must grind.

In the wood behind them was a pack sent
Of black sleuths, greedy and running on their trails
As hounds just freed from chains on prey are bent.

Into the fallen they dug teeth and nails,
And the poor wreck limb off from limb they rent,
Carrying away with them the live entrails.

My escort took my hand and with me went
Toward the badly torn-out shrub, in vain
Through its bleeding wounds giving off moist lament.

“Giacomo of Sant’Andrea” it said “why strain
Into this bush of mine to take repair?
For thy unholy life I owe no pain”.

When my master stood over that soul's lair,
He asked: “Who art thou, through many tips
Plaintive words blowing with blood-mingled air?”

And it to us: “O ye wandering lips,
Who came to see the disgraceful loot
That so badly from me my black fronds clips,

Have them gather'd at this afflict'd trunk's foot.
I belong'd to the city that exchanged
For the Baptist her ancient master's root,

So that this one always shall feel estranged
And shall make her most sorry; and were it not
That some traces of him on Arno ranged

Still remain, on the barren ashen plot
Left by Attila all later toil and trade
Of founding fathers would decay and rot.

My mansions unto me gallows I made”.
Fourteenth Chant

Piety towards my birthplace then stung
Me to collect the scatter’d fronds and bits,
And them back to the silent trunk I hung.

We came then to the boundary that splits
The second from third circle, where it’s clear
How horrid pains to sins high justice fits.

Better to express the things that newly appear,
I’ll say we came to a most forlorn land,
Because no plant can ever take root here.

The sorry wood round this makes a garland
As the sad ditch surrounds in turn the wood:
There we went on apace, holding the rand.

The new space all with coarse dry sand strewn stood,
Not unlike those through which Cato would lead
His men, in Lybian waste barren of food.

O God’s high vengeance, all the men who read
What was reveal’d to these mine eyes, must fear
Thy power in the utmost, and mercy plead!

Of naked souls many a flock saw I here,
And all were weeping wretchedly, and it seem’d
That a different law each flock did steer.

On their back some were lying, and some teem’d
Sitting all close together; others yet
Were unrestedly going, or so I deem’d.

Of those wandering larger was the set,
And less of those torment’d in fixed stall,
Who their pain out with readier tongues let.

Upon those dry coarse sands, in a slow fall,
There rained swollen flakes of burning flame,
As in a windless alp unceas’d snowfall.

It’s said that Alexander, when he came
To the hot Indian lands, on his men saw
Rain down fires that scorch’d the very same
Earth, for which he made them stamp out the raw
Sparks with feet, that each ardent vapour beat
Out could be while alone. And the same law

Follow’d the falling down eternal heat;
So that the sand ignit’d, as under flint
Dry tinder, adding scald to burning sleet.
Without repose ever went on, by dint
Of pain, the dance of wretched hands, from all
Parts of body to shake the fiery glint.

I began: “Master, thou who always stall
Every hitch, except the fiendish throng
Who came out of their door at our first call,

Who is that stately shade standing so strong
Against this rain, lying grim and full of spite,
Who ‘s mellow’d naught by fire; and what ‘s his wrong?”

And that same soul, who perceived by right
That of him I was asking, shout’d: “As I
Did in life, so in death keep up my fight.

Should Jove tire out his smith, hard as can try,
From whom he took the sharpen’d lightning that
On my last day struck me from highest sky,

-Or should he tire in turn the Cyclops at
Aetna’s black forge, once again calling out:
‘Valiant Vulcan, thy help bring to my threat!’,

As at Flegra against Titans had to shout–,
And shoot his darts on me hard as he will,
Of merry vengeance would be left without.”

Then my leader spake out so loud, that till
That point I never heard such forceful tone:
“O Capaneus, in that thy pride is still
Uncurb’d, thou all the more thy sins atone;
No torment but thy unrepented rage
Would be to thy mad fury apt grinding stone”.

Then, turn’d to me with better mien, the sage
Said: “This was one of seven ancient kings
Who sieged Thebes; and since that bygone age
Had God in spite, and still his word so rings;
But, as I just told him, his fury blind
As well-deserved trim to his chest clings.

Now along after me do come, and mind
Still not to put thy feet on the hot ground,
But always close to wood safe path to find”.

Without words we went on, and at last found
A small flow, that its course out of wood took,
Whose red hue still appals me beyond bound.

As out of Bulicame flows the brook
That then lost women among them divide,
Such out of wood was of that stream the look.

Its bottom and the banks on either side
Were wrought of stone, and so were both the dykes,
So I perceiv'd on them was safe to ride.

“Among all other things met in thy hikes
After we passed through the upper door
Whose threshold is denied to none, the likes

Of none of them is worth of note aught more
To thy eyes than this river, which above
All raining flames out of their heat e'er wore.”

These words were spoken by my leader; love
Took me to taste the substance of the meal
For which my whetted appetite then strove.

“In midsea,” said he “now in need of heal,
Sits the island of Crete, under whose first
King the world had of chaste virtue the seal.

A mountain rises there, now realm of thirst
And deserted, onetime enliven'd by
Waters and fronds, as Ida known from erst.

As a safe cradle Rhea elect'd this high
Place for her son, and better to conceal
Him, when crying, made her serfs send noise to sky.

The mount's secret entrails upright reveal
A great old man; to Damiata his back points
And he mirrors himself in Rome with zeal.

His head is of fine gold wrought; then the joints
Of chest and arms of pure silver consist,
Then copper down to groin the statue appoints;

The lower limbs selected iron list,
Save the right foot which is of baked clay;
On this more than on left all members list.

Every part, except the gold, gives way,
By dint of crack, to tears that drop apace,
Until, collected, pierce that rock away.

Their course through this deep valley winds its trace;
Acheron, Styx and Phlegethon they feed;
Then down this narrow gutter their streams race

Till where the slopes of land no lower lead;
There they beget Cocitus; what that pond
Is, thou shalt see; now it's fit not to read.”
And I: “If this red brook has such close bond
To our world, whence it comes, why it appears
Only at this inner rim, and then beyond?”

Answer’d he: “As thou knowst, this place all steers
In round, and though to the left hand long way
Thou trod, which more and more the bottom nears,
Through a whole circle yet did not foray:
Thus, should thou meet things never seen before,
It’s fit keep wonder from thy face away”.

“Master, where are” I was bold to ask more,
“Lethe with Phlegethon? Of th’ one thou naught
Told, and the next, said, comes from Ida’s core.”

“All thy questions for sure I like for aught”,
Replied he; “but the boiling ruddy flow
To the latter prompt answer should have brought.

And Lethe thou shalt see, not ere this low
Ditch we’ve left, but where souls to cleanse are sent
Once repentance has wip’d sins off their brow.”

Then added: “Now it’s time our path be bent
Off the wood; behind me follow my tread:
By these unburnt brook’s dykes safe way is lent,
As above them all ardent vapour’s dead”.
On one of the hard margins we now hike,  
And the brook’s vapours linger on above,  
From fire preserving both water and dyke.  

Between Wissand and Bruges thus, they say, strove  
The Flemish to repel with screens the sea,  
Fearing the surges that oft toward them rove;  

And along Brenta are wont to make levee  
The Paduans, to defend mansion and manor,  
Lest from Carinthian molten snow must flee.  

In that likeness the infernal levees ran, or  
Rather not as much thick, nor high as much,  
Whatever craftsman made them in that tenor.  

We had already with the wood lost touch  
By far, so I could not my whereabouts  
Know, had I turn’d my head to look at such,  

When we met a cohort of damned louts  
Coming along the dyke, and each of those  
At us was looking, as a far man scouts  

A man at night, when new moon’s time is close;  
They so peeled their sight at us, as peels  
Old tailor nearing needle’s eye to nose.  

Thus glanced at by them of beating heels,  
I was by one so running recogniz’d,  
Who took me by the hem and let out peals:  

“What wonder!” His cook’d countenance I siz’d,  
While he thus had his arm to me distended;  
In spite of his sear’d face I then appriz’d  

Him, for old knowledge present features mended;  
And my hand lower’d to his forehead, saying:  
“Sir Brunetto! Here, of all places, have you wended?”  

And he: “Be not displeased, son, if, straying  
From these ranks, with thee aught his way reverts  
Sir Brunetto Latini, his sin here paying”.  

I told him: “What I can, for your deserts  
I’ll do; and if you like, I shall remain,  
Unless this going with me my wish everts.”  

“My son” he said, “whoever in this train  
Stops awhile, a hundred years shall lie  
Without defense against the burning rain.
Proceed, then, on: I’ll follow by and by,
And then I shall rejoin my sorry blend,
Who weep their sin with everlasting cry.”

I dar’d not down from the high road descend,
To be with him on par: but, as a man
Respectful, it behov’d my head to bend.

He began: “What good fortune, or fate’s plan,
Brings thee down here before thy day has come?
And this so assured shew the way how can?”

“Up there in serene life” I answer’d, “some
Short time ago, I was lost in a wood,
Ere of my age was spun off the outcome.

Yestermorn turn my back to it I would;
This one appear’d to me, when my will fail’d,
And shall lead me, through this harsh way, to good.”

And he: “If thou shalt go where thy star hail’d,
Safe haven thou canst not and glorious miss,
If well I judged when through fair life sail’d;

And had I not so early died amiss,
Fain would I to thy deeds have lent my hand,
Seeing of thee so in favour Heaven’s bliss.

But that ungrateful and malicious band,
Who descended from Fiesole in time past
And still bear mark of rocky mountain land,

For thy good deeds shall against thee stand fast:
And it behoves, for among the sorbs sour
It’s unfit the sweet fig its fruits should cast.

Old repute calls them blind, up there in our
World; miser, envious, proud tribe all:
Of their mores it behoves thy soul to scour.

Thy fate honour so high keeps at thy call,
Hunger for thee both sides shall ever take;
But the sweet herb’s away from those beaks’ thrall.

Fiesolan beasts behoves their fodder make
Of themselves, lest they touch the noble root,
If in their manure, for the saint race’s sake,

Is growing still of those Romans some shoot
Who were establish’d there, when the foul nest
Was made where so great malice then set foot.”

“If fully were accomplish’d my request,”
I answer’d, “you would not be put in ban
Yet from the human nature, so in my best
Memory is stuck, and even now I can
Recall with heartburn, when up in the fair
World you were teaching me the ways for man
To eternity, with tender father's care:
And how I have it dear, long as I have
Life, it behoves my words ever to bare.
What you say of my future course I save
And write down, to be explain'd with other text,
By her who, if I get there, my way can pave.
Ready am I to what Fortune shall send next,
Provided my good conscience shall not prick,
And this I wish to your knowledge be annex'd.
Such caution to my ears earlier did stick:
Therefore let Fortune spin her wheel, as let
We must the peasant wield his hoe and pick.”
My master then his face to right hand set,
Turning back, and at me address'd his gaze;
Then said: “Well listen those who firm writ get”.
Nor for that speak the less, going, is the case
To Sir Brunetto, and I ask him who are
His mates the more renown'd and in high praise.
“Of some, news from thy knowledge I won't bar;
Of others is praiseworthy naught to say,
For to so long a tale time is not par.
In short, that all were clerks can I well lay,
And famous literates of clearest name;
The same foul sins their name in the world fray.
Prisciano goes in those ranks full of shame,
And Francesco d'Accorso; and thou canst see,
Of such disease in search if thou here came,
He whom the serf of servants chang'd of see
To Bacchiglione from fair Arno's banks;
There his ill-stretched sinews ceas'd to be.
More would I tell, but to keep at thy flanks,
And speak, no longer is to me consented,
For new smoke, from the sands issued, new ranks
Hails, from staying with which I am prevented:
I recommend to thee the book I still
Live in, ‘Tesoro' mine: no more be granted".
Then he turn'd, and his move was as men will
Near Verona the 'green cloth' contest run,
In the fields; and he looked as downhill

Fast runs the winner, not the losing one.
Sixteenth Chant

Already from the waterfall that dives
To next circle was heard far-reaching thunder,
Not unlike the loud buzzing of beehives,

When three shades all together split asunder,
Running, from one of the tormented throngs
Passing nearby, the fiery tempest under.

Toward us came, and each with sorry songs
Cried: “Halt there, o thou whose clothes shew
Be man who to our land deprav’d belongs!”

Alas, what sores saw I on them, both new
And old, on all their limbs by fire deep sear’d!
Still, whenever reminded, pain is due.

Their cries to mine wise leader so endear’d,
He turned his face to me, and said: “Be still:
To those courtesy wants their wish be clear’d.

And, were it not for the hot flames that fill
By its own kind this place, I would sure say
Thou, not they, should make haste to meet their will.”

Resum’d, as soon as halt’d they saw our way,
Those three their ancient moaning; and when near,
They wheel’d around, as forbidden to stay,

As oiled naked wrestlers turn and steer,
Appraising their best poise and vantage grip,
Ere each other they strike with fury and fear;

And, so going around, each had to flip
Over its face to me, so that their neck
And feet were ever shifting in their tip.

“If wretchedness of this soil’d low deck
Puts in spite our persons and the pray,”
Began one “of this bare and burned peck,

Our fame at least should bend thy will to say
Who art thou, thus thy living feet to graze
Safe and sound through this Hell tracing thy way.

This of whom the footmarks I tread on, base
As is now, bald and naked, in his look,
Of higher rank had been than meets thy gaze;

Guido Guerra was named, and he took
To many a deed in life with sword and wit;
Grandson was of Gualdrada of honour’d book.
That one, who behind me to grind deems fit,
Is Tegghiaio Aldobrandi, whose voice should
Up in the world be welcome and well-writ.

And I, who here with them these torments stood,
Iacopo Rusticucci was; and harm
More than else did me a wife of averse brood.”

Had from the flames protected me some charm,
Fain would I have beneath jump’d among those,
And methinks would my lord have lent his arm;

But since the scorching fire was there so close,
Fear of burns made me win my eager will
Which to hug them lent hunger to my pose.

Then I began: “Pain, not disdain, did fill
My soul inside for your pitiful state,
-So much that slowly shall be blunt’d its quill-,

As soon as my good lord said words of weight
For which I was assured in my mind
That such were coming as your high fames rate.

In your land was I born, and of your kind
The honour’d names and praiseworthy deeds
Always with fond attention held me in bind.

Leaving the bitter gall, to sweet fruit leads,
As he promis’d, this truthful lord of mine;
But first to the low center our way speeds”.

“Would a long time thy limbs be rul’d by thine
Soul on earth” answer’d he, speaking once more,
“And would thy fame for long after thee shine,

But, pray, care to tell us whether the lore
Of our town still retains kindness and worth
As wont, or is at all deplet’d their store;
‘Cause Guglielmo Borsiere, of recent birth
To our pain, who goes there with yonder throng,
Much grief gives us with words bereft of mirth.”

“The new folks and fast gains that there belong
Such pride and unrestraint begot in thee,
My Florence, that thou weep, and shalt for long.”

This cry was utter’d, with rais’d face, by me;
And at that, as an answer fast and true,
Look’d at each other in dismay the three.

“If so small effort at all times is due”
All said “by thee thy brothers’ wish to meet,
Bless thy soul for such frank and wilful hue!

Therefore, if from this waste thou shalt thy feet
Untangle, and fair stars return to gaze,
When to recall will please this our dark seat,

Prithee, among live folks our name do raise."
Their wheel they broke at that, and to their flight
Wings seem'd to be their fleet legs in fast chase.

Hardly an 'amen' could have been said, when sight
Was lost of them, so fast they ran away;
For which to move my master deem'd then right.

I follow'd him, and short had been the way
When the waterfall sound so loud did grow,
Hardly would carry, had we then talk'd, our say.

Like that river that winds, from high to low,
First from the mount of Veso to the east
On the left flank of Apennines' long bow,

'Stillwater' known by name on high, ere, eas'd
Downhill, it runs in its lowermost bed,
And at Forlì from such name has surceas'd,

That above Saint Benedict Alp, shed
Its high ground, rumbles down with single fall
Into a valley that thousands could have fed;

Thus, down a rugged slope, the booming call
Was heard by us of that dark stream resound
So loud, in a short time would deafen all.

A string across my waist I carried wound,
With which I thought, once, I could catch and tie
The speckled-mantle pard stalking around.

As my leader had bidden me, to untie
At all I had the string from me, then hand
It to him, as a skein roll'd up to lie.

He turn'd to his right side, holding it, and
He threw some distance out from the cliff's brink,
Into the ravine deep, the coiled band.

"It behoves a new thing" I came to think
To myself “answer this unused sign
My master made, with which his gaze keeps link.”

Alas, how much must man tread cautious line
Near those who see not only any open deed,
But inner thoughts can read with wit most fine!
“Soon shall come up” he then told me indeed,
“What I am waiting and thy thoughts now dream:
Soon it behoves its face come to thy heed”.

Ever 's best to avoid telling things that seem,
Albeit true, false; for the beholders those,
Without man's guilt, shameful lies then deem;

But I my lips, to hide the truth, can't close;
And on my own Comedy's rhymes I swear,
Reader, may they please thee without repose,

That I saw then through the dark thicken'd air
Coming up, as if swimming, a vague shape,
Awesome sight for bravest hearts to bear,

As may come back, the sea surface to scrape,
Man who div'd down, an anchor to release
From rock or strand hindering its escape,

Who, while extending arms, the legs must squeeze.
Seventeenth Chant

“Here’s the monster of sharpen’d narrow tail,
Which passes mounts, and all the world can stink;
Walls and arms against it are of no avail!”

Thus my leader began to tell me; a wink
He then made so the beast would get ashore
Of the trod stony dykes near to the brink.

That filthy image of fraud then without more
Ado came over and, its tail hanging out,
On the abyss’ edge it leant but head and fore.

Like the face of a just man was its snout,
So benevolent was its outer look,
And of a snake the body lying without.

Its two claws hairs up to the armpits took;
Its back and breast and sides were as if tainted
With knots and wheels not found in any book:

More diverse hues their cloths never had painted
Tartar or Turks in relief or background,
Nor with such were Arachne’s webs acquainted.

As barges are sometimes drawn on to ground,
That partly in water, partly ashore they lie;
As in the thirsty Germans’ land is found

That beavers dip their tails to ambush by,
So the monster most foul had gained beach
Where a stone rim girdles the hot sands nigh.

Its whole tail in the void was darting; each
Of the two poison’d tips upward was bent
That as a scorpion’s armed the tail end’s reach.

Said my leader: “It behoves now we are sent
Somewhat away from the straight course, to near
Th’evil beast yonder lying which up there went”.

Thus, going down, to the right-hand we steer,
And ten steps on the brink onward we take,
Of the sand and fire rain well keeping clear.

When we are nearer to the noxious snake,
A little farther I see folks, a-sitting
On the sand, who of void’s edge their benches make.

Here said my master: “Before we are quitting
This circle, full experience thou should gain
Thereof; go see what pain in them is hitting.
Brief talks with them I enjoin to entertain;
While thy steps thou retrace back, I 'll speak
To this one, that he lend his shoulders fain."

Thus farther on alone I go, to seek
The folks sitting in sorrow on the outmost
Edge of that seventh circle hot and bleak.

Hard from their eyes for burning pain were toss'd
Tears, and in succour flying were seen the hands
Of those in vapours or in hot sands lost;

Not otherwise in summer a dog stands
Scratching with snout or paws, when sourly bit
By pests, be fleas or flies, in sunburnt lands.

When in their face my gaze took nearer hit,
No one I recogniz'd among the wrecks
On whom the painful fire rains down; but writ

On the pouches that all carried round their necks
I saw different signs and varied tints,
Which their sight fell upon with frequent checks.

As among them with curious eye these hints
I take, I see in yellow field some blue
That of a lion's face and mien had dints.

Another purse saw I, after some few
Further steps, red as blood, shewing a crest
With a goose more than butter white in hue.

And one who bore an azure sow impress'd
On his white pouch, look'd up and thus: "What art
Thou doing in this ditch?" then me address'd;

"Now from our sorry abode promptly depart,
Live soul; but know that here shall sit in pain
My neighbour Vitaliano, on this left part.

From Padua I hail, with Florentines this rain
Enduring; often they offend my ear
Loudly shouting: «Let come the sovereign
Knight, on whose purse shall the three bucks show clear!»"
Here he, twisting his mouth, the tongue out stood,
As an ox licks its nose, and made a leer.

And I, fearing my stay could vex the good
Master, who had told me to make short ride,
Hastened back from that tormented brood.

I found my leader mount'd already astride
The shoulders of the feral-looking beast,
Telling me: “Thy strong heart now shew, and pride.

From here on to descend such stairs be pleas’d:
Mount in front, so I can place myself midway,
The forked tail’s menace to make surceas’d”.

As shuddering from coming ague men stay
With pale-coloured nails, and shake with cold
From the mere sight of shadows in full day,

Thus I became at his words as soon told,
But shame threatened me, lending me heart
As in front of brave master slaves are bold.

I settled down on that rough back’s high part:
I wish’d to say, but the voice did not come
As I expected: “Hold me ere we start”.

But, as already he’d come to rescue on some
Other occasion, as soon as I mount there
His arms around me clasp’d my brace become;

He said then: “Gerion, now take us to air:
Thy turns be wide, and thy descent be slow:
Think of the uncommon burden in thy care”.

As a vessel comes out of haven, bow
Trailing on stern, the beast from the rim heaves;
And as soon as it feels at ease to row,

Where the breast was the tail, turning, now leaves;
And this stretch’d, as an eel’s, darts then around,
While with its claws the air gathers and cleaves.

Fright never was, I think, to exceed the bound
Of mine, when Phaeton forsook the brake,
And the sky cook’d, as still we see from ground,

Or wretch’d Icarus felt his loins to bake
And lose their plumage for the molten glue,
While his father “Bad way”, shouted, “thou take!”

Not lesser is my dread, when in a few
Moments I see in midair we are, and know
Sight of no thing save of the beast that drew

Us to the void, swimming as slow as slow;
That it swims downward I cannot perceive
If not for wind in front and from below.

On my right hand deep rumble I receive
Of dreadful streams falling far down, for which,
Leaning out, to the abyss my gaze I give.
There fires joined with sounds of tearful pitch
Make me still more afraid to lose my seat,
So I clench my thighs and, crouching, low I hitch.

Grievous pains ever nearer then would meet
Me from sides ever-changing; clear at last
Were turns and drop of that aerial street.

As the hawk that longtime on wings was cast,
-Which, without seeing decoy or real prey
Prompts the hawker to say: “Thou fall!” aghast-,

Tired descends with hundred turns to bay
Whence he mov’d with bold wings, and far alights
Full of disdain, from his master astray,

Thus Gerion depos’d us, ending our flights,
Of the sheer wall of rock just at the foot,
And, leaving us amid renewed plights,

Fast shot away, as arrows from bow shoot.
Eighteenth Chant

A place in Hell nam’d Evilpit is found,  
Of stone the dark colour of steel all made,  
As the circle it is girt by all round.  

Right in the mid of the malignant glade  
A well-like void gapes, very wide and deep,  
Whose lay I shall in proper place leave said.  

The ring that lies between the void and steep  
High hard cliff laid without, in shape is round,  
Divided in ten vales, which its guests keep.  

Such as, where castles many moats surround  
Of their stout walls outer defense to make,  
Peculiar figure takes that part of ground,  

A like image those vales were seen to take;  
And as, from sill of fortress to the edges  
Of outer moat, small bridges cross each lake,  

Thus fan in from cliff’s foot some rocky ledges  
Cutting through all the dykes and all the vales,  
To the pit where, converging, end those wedges.  

In that place, down from Gerion’s tinted scales,  
We were now; and my poet to left hand side,  
And I behind his steps, mov’d in those pales.  

On my right hand I saw new pity bide,  
New tormentors, new tormentors, of whom all  
The first vale looked full, for all it’s wide.  

Naked the sinners walk along that mall,  
Facing us in the near half vale, their back  
Shewing beyond; and faster their steps fall.  

In the same way the Romans, for the lack  
Of space over the bridge, in the Holy Year,  
Chose to let pass of pilgrims the great stack:  

Those on one side their forehead all steer  
On the castle, Saint Peter’s church to attain;  
On the other side all keep that part to rear.  

Hither and thither on the dismal plain  
Saw I the horned devils with great whips  
Cruelly hit the wretch’d on back; the slain,  

Oh, how were fast to raise their flayed hips  
At the first blows! None among them, for sure,  
Waited the second ones, nor the third flips.  
While I went, in a soul my eyes to endure
Were led; and soon as I had look'd, I said:
"His face to me is by no means obscure";

So I, to recognize him better, stay'd:
And my sweet leader stood, as stand I did,
Consenting that aught back my steps were laid.

That flogged one, hoping to escape, then hid
Lower his face; but little was to avail,
For I: "O thou with bashful eyelid",

Said, "if my mind does not thy semblance fail,
Venedico Caccianemico art nam'd;
But what leads thee to such a sour travail?"

And he: "Unwilling what I justly am blam'd
For, do I tell; but thy clear words are goad
That makes my mind with old life's thoughts inflam'd.
The shameful story is told home and abroad
How I made fair Ghisolabella bend
To marquis' lust; my soul carries this load.
Without my asking, Virgil held not back
His knowledge: "Look on the shade of that great
Coming on, who, though pain'd, of tears shews lack:

How much he still partakes of a king's gait!
He 's Jason, who by dint of wit and heart
To steal the golden Colchis fleece had fate.

He touched Lemnos island; in that part
The bold merciless women all the males
Had put to death, being by Venus marr'd.

There Jason's loving gestures and sweet tales
Isiphiles deceiv'd, the lass who had
Formerly all other girls led into fails.

He left her there alone, pregnant; such bad
Deed damns his shade to the present chastise;
Medea also here's avenged of this lad.

With him go those who the same lies devise:
And 'tis enough of this first vale thou hast
To know, and of the souls here in demise."

We were now where the narrow path at last
Crosses over the second dyke, which makes
A shoulder whence the next of bridges is cast.

As soon there, our ears new wailing shakes
Of folks in the other vale, panting from snout;
Hits from his own hands each one there takes.

The banks are crusted with a mouldy clout
From breathing of those folks thereon congeal'd,
Putting our eyes and nose to loathsome rout.

The bottom was so dark, the sight reveal'd
Nothing if not mounting the arch on high,
Whence downward to the ditch the eye straight steal'd.

There we went; and at bottom, thence, saw I
Folks mir'd in stinking dung, which truly seem'd
Taken from men's latrines, and there laid by.

And I, while down my eyes with some strain beam'd,
A head I saw with hair so full of shit,
If it were lay's or clerk's could not be deem'd.

He scolded me: "Why hast thou so keen wit
To look at me rather than these soil'd ones?"
And I: "Because, if my memory is fit,

I earlier saw thee with drier buns,
And Alexis Interminelli hast name;  
So I look at thee, and others my sight shuns”.

Then he, hitting his head with heartfelt shame:  
“Here led me to be immersed those allures  
From which never my tongue had become lame”.

After this, Virgil said: “If now endures  
Thy sight some farther to be push’d, ‘twon’t fail  
To see the face, despite the foul manures,

Of that filthy dishevel’d slut, with nail  
All shitty scraping on her skin, and now  
Rising to stand, now crouching down to quail.

She is Thais, the whore, who, asked ‘How  
Much dost thou favour me?’ by Traso, said:  
‘To thee wonderful graces indeed I bow!’

And of this be our sight well sat’d and paid.”
Nineteenth Chant

Simon wizard’s disciples most fool,
Who, in rapacious greed, the godly things,
Which should be goodness’ brides, through earthly tool

Of gold and silver wed with wicked rings!
Now in this third of vales where is your den
Of your sins high and stern my clarion sings.

Already we had mount’d on the bridge, then,
Until the highest point; the middle part
Right below lay of that sorrowful pen.

O supreme wisdom, how great is seen the art
Thou show in Heavens, on Earth and in Hell,
And how exactly does thy wit compart!

Wherever on the banks, or bottom, fell
My gaze, by holes was pierc’d the livid stone,
All the same size, round each as round ’s a bell.

None seem’d to be any smaller, and had none
A larger girth, than those for baptism set
In my Saint John’s, which fairest stands alone;

One of which, not many years back, I let
Split up, to save a man drowning inside;
And this be seal any false tale to offset.

Within each hole a sinner dwelt to hide,
Upended, up to his calves, and out but leant
The lower legs and feet; and side by side

Both soles were lighted up with fire unspent,
For which so strongly writh’d with burning dire,
To hold them no stout twine could have been meant.

As upon oiled thing blazing of fire
Flickers along but on external skin,
From heels to toes thus it was seen to spire.

“Master, who is that shade, whom seems to win
The pain more than his mates, darting so strong”
Said I “for ruddier flames his foot and shin?”

“If by me thou be carried right along
Down that bank that with lower slope there lies,
Of him and of his guilt shall tell his song”.

And I: “If thou like it, my own will vies
With thine: thou art the lord, and I stand fast
To thine intent, which my thoughts inmost spies”.

77
We came then to the fourth of dykes, at last;  
Thence, turning, we went down to left-hand side,  
Till on pierc’d, singed bottom I was cast.

My good master yet longer kept me astride  
His hip, until we reach’d the hole where sore  
Kicking reveal’d sharp pain of him inside.

“O thou who art thus plugged in this bore  
As poles are wont to be, so sadly upended,”  
Said I, “speak word, if not prevent’d afore.”

I was standing as friar stands, intended  
To confess the evil killer, who, stuck down,  
Calls him again, to have his death suspended.

And he cried: “Did thou enter this town  
Already, Boniface? here yet thou stood?  
By many a year must I the book disown.

Art thou so early sat’d of earthly good  
For which thou didst not fear yet to deceive  
The fair lass, of whom thou made waste and food?”

As confused will stand those who receive  
An answer they cannot intend, so I  
Stood disconcerted, tongue held in reprieve.

Then Virgil said: “Tell him: ‘Standing close by  
Is not the soul, is not the soul thou think’”;  
And thus I answer’d to the upended’s cry.

At this, the shade stuck down in that rock chink  
Twist’d his feet, and with sighing voice of tears  
Said: “Then what ’s it thou ask? If thou did sink

Till here down the dark slope, despite all fears,  
Just ‘cause thou care so much to know my name,  
Learn that I wore the mantle without peers;

And verily was born from Bear of fame,  
Greedy so much to advance bear-cubs, that gold  
Up on earth, and myself here, put in frame.

Below my head are plugg’d many other old  
Simoniaec, in deep cracks flatten’d away,  
Who before me the saintly things had sold.

Down there shall fall I too, when comes this way  
He whom I took thee for just now, as plain  
Shew’d the question I hasten’d then to say.

But longer time were cook’d my feet, and lain  
Have I longer so upended, than he will
Stay plugged, soles by red fire overlain:

‘Cause after him from east a fouler still
Lawless shepherd to come, worse in his deeds,
Above both it behoves this hole to fill.  

A new Jason he is, of whom man reads
In the Macchabees’ book; and as his king
Complied with this, so France’s sire him heeds.”

I don’t know if I did then a rash thing
Or not, answering him with such a say:
“Prithee, tell now: what treasur’d crown or ring

Asked Our Lord from Peter, in the way
Of reward, to give him the keys in trust?
Naught He asked, if not ‘Behind me stay’.

Neither Peter nor others Matthew must
Reward with gold or silver, for the place
Of Judas, when the scoundrel fell to dust.

Therefore stay put, deserving thy disgrace;
And of th’ ill-earned pay that made thee bold
Against Charles of Anjou keep careful trace.

And, were it not for reverence oft told
To be due to the saintly keys thou had
Entrusted in thy happier life of old,

Still heavier words would I use for your sad
Avarice, which depraves the world of men,
Wounding the good and exalting the bad.

Through you shepherds saw well Saint John’s eye, when
The woman who on a sea of folks presides
Was seen by him to whore in the kings’ den;

She who was born with seven heads, whose sides
With ten horns were adorn’d, whence might she drew
While her husband for virtue shed world’s prides.

Gold and silver ‘s the God you shepherds hew,
And idolaters you would be in my sight,
Were it not that you many, and they pray few!

Alas, how great, Constantine, was the blight
Not thy conversion, but thy gift begot,
That which the first rich pope to accept thought right!”

And while I sung to him these hard and hot
Notes, be it for outrage or conscience bite,
Stronger he danced with both feet his trot.
I deem indeed that my leader thought right
Of me, so pleas'd a face he lent to those
True words of mine express'd with heated spite.

Then in his arms again he held me close,
And when I was securely in his fold
On the slope just dismount'd once more he rose.

Nor did he tire to bear me in his hold,
But to the bridge's summit brought my weight
Where the new dyke is accessed from old.

Here softly he let me down, halting his gait,
Taking care, for the ground was rough and steep,
Such that to tread on it the goats would hate;

Thence I could peer into next vale down deep.
Twentieth Chant

Of new pain it behoves me to make rhymes,
Substance to give to this twentieth book
Of the first poem, which is about man’s crimes.

I had set out with my whole wit to look
Into the bottom of the vale, in view
Drenched with painful tears, that God forsook;

And I saw folks in the round gorge not few
Approaching, mutely weeping, with slow pace
As processions on earth to walk are due.

When my gaze lower went, down from their face,
Wondrously twist’d appear’d to me their neck
Betwixt the chin and the shoulders’ first trace;

‘Cause their forehead backward was held in check,
And backwards it behov’d them to proceed,
Forward to look since they could not, nor treck.

That by palsy could have someone indeed
Been disfigured so, might run the tale;
But I know not of such, nor give it creed.

If God lets thee, good reader, take avail
Of thy reading, now for thyself, pray, think
If to be awash with tears I could then fail,

When our image I saw at such close link
So distorted, that from the eyes the tears,
Running down, wet the buttocks through their chink.

I wept indeed, leant on some rocky spears
Of the hard mountain, so that my wise head
Said: “To the fools thy soul so closely nears?

Here piety lives on when it is dead:
None is more wicked than the foolish man
Who bears compassion to God’s justice dread.

Raise now thy sight, raise it, so that thou can
See him for whom near Thebes the earth was rent,
While all shouted: «Whereto thy fortune ran,

Amphiaraos? away from war it’s bent?»
Nor did he cease from tumbling down the crack
Until to all-grabbing Minos was he sent.

Look how as breast is now serving his back:
Because forward too much he strove to see,
Backwards he stares and keeps retreating track.
See Tiresias, who changed look, when he  
From male to the female his sex converted,  
And all his limbs transformed had to be;  

And it behoved him to strike diverted,  
Again, with wand, the two conjoined snakes,  
Ere his male plumage back to him reverted.

Aronthas to his belly the back takes,  
He who in the Luni mountains, there where weeds  
The peasant who in Carrara a lair down makes,

A cave among white marbles us'd for his deeds,  
From which his sight over the nightly stars  
And the open sea gain'd unimpeded leads.

And she who with loose braids over there bars  
Her breasts' sight, that thou cannot behold,  
As beyond are all parts which some hair mars,

Is Manto, who in life roamed lands untold;  
In the country of my birth she rest'd at last,  
So it pleases me some time thy heed to hold.

After her father's life was spent and past,  
And Bacchus'town fell into serfdom bleak,  
She for long time through the world's roads was cast.

Within Italy fair, up there, they speak  
Of a lake at Alps' foot, Benaco, closing  
Alemannia above Tyrol castle's peak.

From thousand issues waters there reposing  
The land that stretches between mount and lake  
And Camonica valley keep on hosing.

At an island in it could blessings make  
The bishops from Verona and Brixia lands,  
And Trentino, should they such a way take.

Where lower bank its southern waters bands,  
Sits Peschiera, the fair bulwark and strong  
Against Bergamo and Brixia to make stands.

There it behoves all waters run along  
That cannot in the lake find room; these same  
A river then become, green grass among.

As the current takes head to flow, its name  
From Benaco to Mincio is chang'd anon,  
Till at Govérnolo into Po takes aim.

A short course run, through a low land goes on  
Widening; stagnant water the land sogs;
Unhealthy it oft in summer they reckon.

Through here passing, right in the midst of bogs
The virgin saw a harsh ground, all untilled,
Uninhabit’d by men, scarce fit for dogs.

Therein to escape all human bond she stilled
Her wanderings, and there she fix’d her seat
With her serfs, and her life vainly fulfilled.

The men who all around happen’d to beat
Flock’d at last to that place, which a stronghold
Was for marsh from all sides lambent its feet.

The city founded they over those old
Bones; and from her who first the site elected,
Mantua nam’d it; all spells chose to withhold.

Thicker within were folks, before dejected
Were they by Pinamonte’s fraud, when mad
Casalodis he duped and rejected.

Therefore warn I thee now, if ever bad
Tale shalt thou hear about my city’s root,
To take care that no lie the truth should clad”.

And I: “Master, thy reasonings take foot
In my belief, and so certain they stand,
That dead coals other talks would seem, and moot.

But tell me of the folks here close at hand
If someone worthy of note thou canst out seek:
‘Cause only of this my mind renews demand”.

Said Virgil: “He who sends down from his cheek
The beard over his tanned shoulders, when
Of adult males was Greece bereft, and weak

Newborn hardly were left ones in each den,
Augur was, and with Calchas chose the time
In Aulides when should set sail Greek men.

Euripilos was nam’ed; so in my rhyme
He’s sung: well shouldst thou know, who all
Learned that lofty tragedy in thy prime.

The next, lean in the hips, they us’d to call
Michael Scot, and he verily possessed
The key to magic frauds that fools enthral.

See with Guido Bonatti Asdente, obsessed
By regret to have left leather and twine;
His vain repentance, though, is late addressed.
And see those women, who likewise repine
Needle, spindle and shuttle they did leave
Idle aside, the future to divine

And webs of spells with herbs and signs to weave.
But south of Seville ‘Cain and thorns’ the sea
Touch, and both emispheres; for us to heave

It’s time; yesterday night full moon would be;
Well shouldst thou know: its helpful rays were sent,
A few times, through the dark forest, to thee”.

Thus he spake, and along the while we went.
So from bridge to next bridge, other things saying
That best out of my Comedy are left,
We went; and on the summit we were staying
To throw our look over the other cleft
Of Evilpit and over its vain wails;
And awfully 'twas seen of light bereft.

As in Venice dockyard, in winter, pails
Are set a-boiling with the sticky pitch
To mend again of their vessels the fails,
-'Cause they cannot sail out, and in that hitch
Some make new keel and some recaulk the staves
Of ship that for long sailing is to stitch;

One hammers nails on prow, one the stern paves,
Others make oars and others roll the rigs,
While one from rents the reef or mainsail saves -;

So from God's power, not from fire of sprigs,
Down there was boiling some thick bubbling glue
That all the banks made sticky in those low digs.
I was looking on it, but naught was due
To be seen but the bubbles there a-boiling,
And swelling up, and settling down to flue.

While I was staring down with eyes a-roiling,
My leader said: "Look, look!" and to his side
Drew me, away from the spot where I was toiling.
I turned then, as man who can't abide
To see from what it behoves him to flee,
And whom suddenly fear robs of all pride,

Who does not stay his flight for want to see;
And a black demon behind us I saw
Running up the stone path with awful glee.
O how he looked in his semblance raw!
And how his posture merciless in look,
With open wings and lightly poised paw!

On his sharp shoulder bold, a sinner shook,
With legs hanging in front down from the hip,
Whom by the ankles the black angel took.
From our bridge he said: "O Evilgrip,
Here comes one of Saint Zita's noble lords!
Put him well under, while I make back trip
To a land in them well stocked, where affords,
Bonturo excluded, bribing to each his will;
For gold from 'nay' to 'yeah' there justice fords.

Down threw his load, and on the hard rock sill
He turned; never sleuth, unbound, did shoot
In more haste after thief, to catch and kill.

The sinner div'd, and rose head over foot;
But demons pois'd under our bridge's lid
Shouted: "Here the Saint Face is render'd moot:

Here thou 'll swim not as in thy Serchio did!
So, if to avoid our scratches thou hast wish,
Above this pitch never to show make bid."

A hundred spear'd him then with hooks, as fish,
Saying: "Underneath it behoves thee to dance,
Trying in stealth to snatch some juicy dish".

Not otherwise are scullions wont to lance
The boiling meat with forks, on word of cook,
To keep it down, lest it float up by chance.

Then my good master: "Lest those fiends should look
And see thee" said, "crouch down behind a stone,
Where thou can find, hid from their gaze, a nook;

Nor, for offence that against me be done,
Be fearful, for these things I master well,
And such deal I met not this time alone."

Then he cross'd where the bridge's shoulder fell,
And when he reach'd the sixth border, sure had
Need to show bold forehead, and all fear quell.

With the same frenzy used by fury-mad
Dogs against beggar, when against him bay
While he stops, in the begging act, ill-clad,

Out ran the demons from under the bay
Of the bridge, and against him point'd their spears;
But he shouted: "No one of ye dare lay

His hook on me! Ere any of ye here nears,
Send forth someone to listen; and decide
Only then whether 's fit to come to tears."

All shouted: "Eviltail should go!" With pride
One of them stepped forward -the others standing-
And came to Virgil saying: "Why thus bide?"

"Thinkest thou, Eviltail, see me on this landing
To have come" said my master "safe and sound
From any snare of yours and any stranding,
Without right fate and divine will unbound?
Let us go on, 'cause up on high I 'm writ
Lead on this sylvan path man yonder found.”

Then so crestfallen was his pride, 'twas fit
His hook be lower'd and at his feet fall,
And to his mates he said: “Leave him unbit”.

And my leader to me: “I thee now call,
Thou in the shards hid: forward come at last;
Assuredly wend here, leaving thy stall”.

So I mov'd, and to him my pace went fast;
And the demons all forward rush'd, with leer,
So I feared lest their compact off they cast:

Thus I upon a time saw in great fear
The infantrymen out of Caprona file,
Surrender'd, seeing enemy ranks near.

I turned not my shy eyes from their vile
Menacing semblance, and my person all
Sidled along my lord, trusting his wile.

Those were tilting their hooks and “Let it fall”
Said to each other “on his back!” And “Aye”,
Answered, “make him taste its bitter gall!”

But that demon with whom Virgil held say
In haste turned and: “Now, now, Shevelmane”,
Said, “don't hurt him; thy hook put soon away!”

Then to Virgil: “Farther along this lane
No one can go, because at bottom fell
All broken the sixth bridge, for ancient bane.

Therefore, if to proceed thou still think well,
Up this rock choose thy path; thou 'll find nearby
Other bridge which new way for thee can spell.

Yesterday, when five hours more shew'd the sky,
It was twelve hundred sixtysix suns past
That here was cut the path thou wish to try.

I 'm sending there a few of these outcast
To see if any of the drown'd comes up;
Go with those, they 'll be tame from first to last.”

“Come forward, Hellequin, and Frostepup,"
He then began to say, “and thou, Curgnash;
And Curlabeard head of the ten step up.

Libbycock be with them, and Drakengnash,
Sharp-tusked Kourounath and Rippindogs
And Rubicant the fool and Farfarash.

Look all around the boiling pitchy bogs:
These two until the bridge safe pass let have,
The sound one whose abutments the swamp sogs.”

“Alas, master, what words this demon gave?”
Said I. “Prithee, unescorted let us go,
If thou knowst how; ourselves we best shall save.

If thou, as wont, alert of wit art so,
Dost not there see how their sharp teeth they grind,
And with their eyes are threatening us woe?”

And he: “Let not thy fear all thy thoughts blind:
Grind their teeth as they like, us they ’ll not prod;
Their threats are meant for the griev’d boiled kind”.

On left-hand dyke they turn’d, each with his rod;
But first all with the teeth their tongues had bit,
Toward their leader looking, as queer nod;

And his arse to such march was trumpet fit.
Twenty-second Chant

Many a time saw I troops their camp to leave,
And begin battling, and march in display,
And sometimes in a rout their way back weave;

Raiders I saw your land to rove away,
Aretines, and ride horsemen in shells,
And tournaments and jousts to strike and play;

I saw at times with trumpets, at times with bells,
Or drums a-rolling, run castle-rul'd actions,
And with homely tunes and foreign spells;

But never did I see the opposed factions
Of knights or footmen move with stranger sound,
Nor ship sail under shore or star directions.

With the ten demons we were treading ground;
Alas, what fierce company it was! But then
Saints in church, and at inns gluttons are found.

My eyes were fix'd on the shades' sticky den,
To note all the conditions of the place
And of the folks filling that boiling pen.

As dolphins do when, arching their back, race
Through waves to warn the sailors, that they try
To steer their vessel away from the storm's pace,

Thus, now and then, to show their back saw I
Some of the sinners, to relieve their pain,
And then go under, faster than the eye

Could keep track. And as water's edge attain
The frogs, letting but snouts emerge, and hide
Feet and the rest of body, so had lain

On the hot banks the shades on ev'ry side;
But, soon as Curlabeard came near, they would
At once dive down under the boiling tide.

One of them fast enough withdraw down could
Not, as it happens that of frogs in fear
One lingers on, while with the others should

Flee; Rippindogs, who among the ten was near,
Fasten'd the hook in his besmirched hair
And lift'd him up, as an otter to appear.

To note all of their names I 'd taken care,
So keenly over their choice had I look'd on,
How each and one was call'd in mind to bear.
“Rubicant, put thy claws on him anon,”
Shouted the fiends “to peel away his rind!”,
In wild clamour, seeing him so bound and won.  

And I: “O master mine, pray, try to find,
If thou canst, who is that most wretched shade
Ere him these fiends as mincemeat will grind”.

My leader near him then went, and bade
Him to tell of his birth, and he replied:
“In the realm of Navarre I had been made;

In serfdom to a lord my mother tied
Me, whom she had begot from a ribald
Who unmade himself and all his wealth decried.

Then manservant I was of king Theobald;
There in bribery I dealt, for which I pay
Here, where these burning tars so cook and scald.”

Kourounath, from whose mouth sprouted away
At each side a sharp tusk, as a boar’s sprout,
Then made him feel how well with them could flay.

The mouse among bad cats had put his snout;
Curlabeard, thrown his arms around him, said:
“Move over, all of ye, while I this lout
Keep in ward”. And to Virgil: “Ere he laid
Be to waste, ask from him some more, if still
Thy request not in full his tale has paid.”

My leader then: “Tell now: of the other ill-bent souls under the pitch, dost any know
Who from Italy hails?” And he: “I was, till
Short while ago, with one lying down low
From those parts coming: so were I still there!
Nail would I fear there not, nor their spears’ throw.”

And Libbycock: “Too long we had to bear”
Said, with his hook striking an arm, which tore
And shredded, laying its live sinews bare.

Drakengnash too was eager him to gore
Down in the legs; for which their chief, around
Turning, glar’d at each one with mien most sore.

When at last had died out their fury and sound,
To the poor wounded wretch writhing in pain
Without ado my leader ask’d to expound:

“Who was he who thou said with thee had lain,
From whom ill-starred leave thou took to shore?”
“Friar Gomita he was, worth of disdain
As vessel of all frauds, whom to life bore
Gallura land; his lord's enemies were
In his hands, and he dealt them all light score.

He took monies, and freed them then and there,
As he boasts; and in more offices king
Of bribery was held, all laws to dare.

Fair fates sir Michael Zanche near him bring
From Logodoro; and their tongues never tire
To recall this or that Sardinian thing.

Alas!, look at that fiend gnashing with ire;
More would I say, but he gets ready, I fear,
To scratch my scabies with his talons dire.”

And their high chief - Farfarash looming near
Rolling his eyes, ready to strike - “Foul bird”,
Said, “Move over, dare not this soul to spear”.

“That by you some of us be seen or heard,”
Began once more the fearful shade to say,
“Tuscan or lombard all, from that boil'd herd
I 'll call them out, but Evilgrips away
Should withdraw, that be dread not their offence;
Here sitting, seven more I 'll lure this way
By whistling, as we 're wont, to make pretence
The shore is safe; such is the sign agreed
When one under the pitch has pull'd out thence.”

Curgnash raised his snout, paying him heed,
Shook his head, and said loud: “Mark out the snare
He 's laying from our claws away to speed!”

And he, who in his mind had tricks to spare,
Answer'd: “In malice am I steep'd for sure,
Since call my mates to fiercer pain I dare”.

Such challenge Hellequin could not endure,
And, against the others’ wish, said: “If thou fling
Thee down, I shall not try thee to secure
At a run, but above the pitch on wing;
Let's leave this edge, and be the berm a screen,
And we shall see who does more nimble thing.”

O reader mine, new game is to be seen:
Every fiend to the berm's other rim
Turn'd, first of all he who most loath had been.
The Navarrese pick’d the right time; by him
The feet were firmly sprung on ground, and fast
Jumping, he freed himself after his whim.

Each devil then by guilt was left aghast,
He most of all who had caus’d their defeat;
Thus he cried: “Thou art caught!” and lung’d at last.

But to little avail, for, strong though beat
Were the wings, they could not compete with fear:
Down the soul, up the devil turn’d their teat:

Not otherwise wild ducks, sensing that near
Is the falcon, dive suddenly from height,
And, sore and broken, up he strives to steer.

Frostepup, anger’d by the cheat, in flight
After his mate then took, wishing that free
The sinner could escape, to pick a fight.

And, as the briber disappear’d, thus he
Against his mate fast turn’d his nails, and this
Over the ditch be claw’d could then I see.

But the other fiercest hawk of prey could miss
Not to claw him in turn, and both then fell
In the midst of the ponds that boil and hiss.

The heat soon made them loosen up; and well
Would they rise off, but couldn’t, from the pitch,
So much their wings were smear’d in a short spell.

Curlabeard and his mates, sorry one and each,
Made four of them fly on to the other shore
With all their hooks, and fast enough did reach

Here and there their assigned place; afore
Their harpoons pushed toward those there glued,
Who were well cook’d not but on skin, but more

Deep inside; and we left them badly imbued.
Without company, silent and alone
We were going, one in front and one behind,
As friars minor oft on their way have gone.

Aesop’s fable was preying on my mind,
‘Cause the tale where he speaks of frog and mouse
And the past devils’ brawl seem’d of like kind.

Indeed, no more are near ‘cooty’ with ‘louse’
Than the two feats are like, when start and close
Of both are pair’d, if things attention rouse.

As oft from a first thought another rose,
Thus, from mine first, another worse was born,
Which redoubled of my first fear the dose.

Thus I reflected: “Those for us with scorn
And harm were mocked, so that strongly I fear
Their spirits with dire anger must be torn.

If fury to ill-meaning then draws near,
They shall come after us, cruel much more
Than the hound’s teeth the hare would catch and spear”.

Already I felt my hair bristling and hoar
From fear, and vigil stare behind me laid,
Saying: “Master, if thee and me before
Soon thou don’t hide, I’m feeling most afraid
Of Evilgrips: to our rear they come:
I imagine them so, I see their shade”.

And he: “Of leaded glass should I become,
I would not mirror thine outside image
Better than th’inside one, into, I welcome.

Just now thy thoughts were dawning in the cage
Of my mind, with thy words’ selfsame intent;
And both plead the same counsel on that stage.

If the slope at right hand so gently is bent
As to next circle to grant us safe way,
The dread chase shall be fruitlessly spent”.

His speech not yet achiev’d, not far away
I see coming to us with stretched wings
The devils dire, to make of us their prey.

My leader soon took me in his arms - as clings
Mother to son, when rous’d by sudden noise,
Seeing already on fire the nearest things;
She takes her son, lost in her flight all poise,
Of him more than of self having sweet care;
That hardly a shirt she wears least her annoys -,
And down from th’edge of the hard bank did dare
Slide on his back on the sloping surface
Which the sides of the lower valley pare.

Never ran water so fast on the face
Of a gutter, to make an earthmill spin,
When near the vanes fleeter speeds on its pace,
As my master slid, down that border, in,
Bearing me with himself over his breast,
As a true son, not mate nor next of kin.

Hardly the bottom’s bed his feet had press’d,
The pursuers came to the overlying brink,
Nearly upon us; but fear no more impress’d,
For the high powers that saw fit to link
Them, as harsh wardens, to the fifth enclose,
To leave their ward forbade even to think.

Down there we found a painted crowd; all those
Were walking round with gait as slow as slow,
Weeping as persons won, without repose.
The capes they wore had their hoods’ edge set low
Over the eyes, and were cut in the guise
Of those that in Cluny each monk endow.

They are so gilt outside, their sheen gives rise
To dazzling; but, all lead inside, their weight
Makes Fredrick’s ones light as straw in my eyes.

O for all aeons tiresome mantle’s fate!
We turn’d with them to the left hand, intent
To the souls whom such tearful loads prostrate;
But for their burden those so slowly went
Along, that in new company we found
Ourselves each time one hip forward we sent.

To my leader I said: “Thy gaze around
Move to look, going, if thou find someone
Known for his name or deeds in my world’s bound”.

Hearing my Tuscan lilt, behind us one
Of those folks shouted: “Hold your feet, ye two
Who this dark air are cleaving with swift run!

Methinks to thy desire can I give true
Fulfilment.” And my leader, turning, said:
“Wait, and as slow his pace, be slow thine too”.

I stood; their haste one and another shade
Shew’d, by their mien, to be with me rejoin’d;
But them slow’d, with their load, the narrow glade.

As soon abreast with us, in that same point
Without a word at me they look’d askance;
Then with each other thus their doubts conjoin’d:

“Of live man shews his throat motion and stance;
And, if dead, by what privilege they have
Of not wearing our heavy cape the chance?”

One told me: “Tuscan soul, to whom fates gave
To visit the dissemblers’ dismal ranks,
Word of thy birth don’t spurn to give this knave”.

And I to him: “On Arno’s graceful banks
I was born and grew up, in that great town;
To be here with my body I render thanks.

But who are ye, from whom such tears wrings, down
The cheeks, a burning pain commanding dread?
And what dazzling chastise hides your gilt gown?”

And one answer’d me so: “Of woven lead
This golden cape so thick is made, that plight
Of scale creaking for weight endures my head.

In Bononia of Our Lady was I knight,
Catalano by name; so was my mate
Loderingo; thy land took both, by right,
Together as a single chief of state,
Hoping we ‘d keep its peace; and our deed
Was such, still in Gardingo it shews of late.”

“Friars, your ills...” began I; but with speed
I cut my words, for was captur’d, by one
Lying crucified with poles to ground, my heed.

He writh’d, so much my sight seem’d him to stun,
And in his beard blew off a painful sigh;
The first friar’s intent to him had run,

So he told me: “This thou seest nail’d here nigh
Advis’d the Pharisees that it was best
For the people a man to charge and try.

He lies naked across the path’s floor, lest
Otherwise he should fail the full import
Of the weight of each passing soul to test.
And in this ditch is sharing a like sort
His wife’s father, and others from the band
Which for the Jews with such bad seed sow’d tort.

Then saw I Virgil take amazed stand
Over the one who lay so crucified
Exil’d forever in such vile stance and land.

To the friar he then thus signified:
“If ’tis allow’d, be pleased now to say
If passage on right hand here can be tried

Through which to both of us be given way,
Without by dint of force facing the black
Angels, who could chase us from this low bay”.

He replied: “Nearer than thou hope in back
Of thy mind, lies a rock that, from the great
Circle, above all smaller ones runs track,

Save that in this it’s broken, not of late;
You can mount on its ruins, that on the slopes
Lie, and on bottom rise up to some height”.

Virgil stood with low head, as man who mopes;
Then said: “Wrongly the lay of land describ’d
He who up there the sinners spears and ropes”.

And the friar: “In Bononia I heard ascrib’d
To the devil a mound of vices, most
That he ‘s father of lies, liar proscrib’d”.

My leader thereupon great strides off toss’d,
Troubled somewhat by anger in his face;
Thus I departed from that damned host,

Trailing the marks of his beloved pace.
Twenty-fourth Chant

There is a wintry time of newborn year,
When the Sun in Aquarium warms its hair
And the night's length to half the day comes near,

That hoarfrost on earth looks like its fair
White sister for the land-hiding image;
But the short-liv'd brush-stroke soon leaves ground bare.

The young peasant who's short on hay and sage
Rises from bed, looks out, and sees the fields
White all over, and his hip hits in a rage;

Returns indoor, and here and there tools wields,
Complaining, as a poor man with aimless pace;
Then, out once more, despair to new hope yields,

For he sees how has changed the world's face
In a short while; taking his shepherd's crook,
His sheep leads out of pen on pasture's trace.

In the same way dismay'd my soul the look
Of my master, so much troubled him there
I saw, and medicine as soon I took,

'Cause, when near the right bridge at last we were,
The leader turn'd to me with that sweet way
I knew at hill's foot when in my deep despair.

His arms he threw wide open, when the lay
Of the ruins in himself he had assessed,
And, taking me in them, he forg'd away.

And like the man who, as the work progressed,
Seems to forethink what then is to be done,
Thus, lifting me on the next steeply redressed

Shard, he was looking at another stone
Saying: "On that clutch thy hand's grip, but test
First if it's firm; don't trust thy sight alone".

The way was for the cap'd unfit, and rest
Required; hardly the two, he light and I
Pushed along, could mount that eagle's nest;

And were it not that the dykes lower lie
On the pits' inner border than outside,
For me, if not for him, would make hard try.

But since in Evilpit the ground, inside,
Slopes down toward the mouth of the deep pit,
Any of the dykes that all that land divide
To have a low and a high face is fit;
We came at last to the dyke summit, where
Lies of the fallen bridge the ruin’d last bit.

The breath had in my lungs worn out so rare
When I was up, that I had spent all might,
Nay, I sat down as soon as I got there.

“Now it behoves all idleness to fight
By these means” Virgil said, “for in warm bed,
Or in soft chair, no fame was won by right;

And all who without fame their lives have led,
Of themselves up on earth such trace impress
As smoke in air, or foam in water, shed.

Therefore rise up, conquering thy distress
With the will that all battle ever gains
If heavy burdens do not it oppress.

On longer stairs thy future road hence strains;
Those fiends to have escap’d it’s not enough:
Avail thyself of what my speech explains.”

I rose then, shewing myself aught more tough
And having better breath than really I drew,
And said: “I’m ready and bold, however rough
The way; go on”. And we went up the new
Path, which was very narrow, rocky and coarse,
And even steeper than the former grew.

I went speaking, lest I be judged hoarse;
For which a voice was heard from yonder ditch,
Albeit unfit to form human discourse.

What it said, I don’t know, although the pitch
I had reach’d of the arch which overlies;
But of man running had such voice the hitch.

Down was I looking, but living man’s eyes
Could not to the ditch bottom pierce the dark;
For which I: “Lord, as that strange voice denies
To me its meaning, not its sound, so stark
Blind is the sight to discern, though I see;
Let’s come to the other dyke and down debark”.

“No other answer” said “I shall give thee,
If not by doing, for any fair request
Follow’d by silent deed, I think, must be.”

We then descended from the bridge high crest
To where it joins with the eighth dyke, and more
Low still, whence the ditch sight was open best;
And, inside that, saw I serpents galore
Horribly thick, and so diverse in kind,
Their thought curdles my blood to my heart's core.

Lybia in her sands less pride should henceforth find;
‘Cause if chaelydrae and horned vipers bears
That land, and amphisbaenae on her rocks wind,

Not as many pestifer snakes she dares
To shew, not with Ethiopian deserts join'd
Nor with that which above Red Sea shore glares.

Frightened naked folks I saw in that point
Running among that raw sorrowful mound,
Without refuge or heliotrope to anoint.

Their hands behind their back with snakes were bound;
Those pushed through the loins their head and tail,
And in front frightful knot of them was found.

And lo!, on a shade on our side of vale
A snake jumped, and with its fangs hard bit
Where man's neck tapers out from shoulders' pale.

The signs for i or o never were writ
So fast, as he took fire and burn'd and, all
In ashes turn'd, those drop to ground was fit;

And when he lay so undone after the fall,
His dust gathered up by itself, back
To his pristine man's shape heeding the call;

In a like way wise men describe the track
Of the phoenix' new birth, after the end,
When few days to five hundred years still lack:

No grass nor grain in life nourishment lend
To it, but incense drops and other scent,
And nard and myrrh it on last journey send.

And as to fall, not knowing how, man's bent
By demon's act driving him down to ground,
Or by any other hindrance to him sent,

And rising then, dismay'd, he looks around,
All bewildered by the cruel woe
He suffer'd and, while gazing, his sighs sound;

Such was the sinner risen from his throe.
O God's power! How is it stern in hitting,
For retribution, with such blows its foe!

My leader ask'd: “Where is thy country sitting?
And who art thou?” And he: “From Tuscan seed
My soul for this fierce ditch Pistoia is quitting.

Beastly life, not of man, I chose to lead,
As it behoves my mulish birth; and fit
Lair was my town to such a beast or weed.”

And I to Virgil: “What guilt to this pit
Leads him, ask, ere he tries to slip away;
I saw him ready on earth to blood and hit”.

The sinner, who had heard, false words to say
Dar’d not, but turning sight and soul to me
For dismal shame chang’d of his face the way;

Then said: “More am I hurting that thou see
My person in the vile state I lament,
Than when from the other life I had to flee.

I can’t refuse to answer thy intent:
I am so lowly plac’d because the thief
I was, who stole all the fair church’s content;

Others, falsely accus’d, carried the grief.
But, so that thou canst not enjoy my sight,
If ever thou ’ll be out of this dark fief,

Open thy ears to announce of future plight:
First Pistoia of the Black people is shorn;
In Florence with new ways changes hands the might.

Vapour by Mars from Val di Magra is born
By turbid clouds surround’d; and in the field
Over Campo Piceno by wind torn

A vehement fierce battle it shall wield;
For which the clouds shall sudden crack apart,
So that every White shall lose his shield.

And this I say to give thee sorry start!”
At the end of those words his hands the thief
Rais'd, and with both of them the fingers gave,
Shouting: “Take that from me, God, for thy grief!”

Friendly were then the snakes to me: the knave
By one of them was girded round the neck,
As if it want’d to mean: “Cease now to rave!”;

Another wrapp’d his arms, so tight to check
Their motions, clinching itself up on front,
That they could not then move the smallest speck.

Alas, Pistoia, why spent ash thou don’t
Choose to become, ceasing on earth to last,
Since thy seed ever to evil deeds is wont?

Through all Hell’s circles which I walked past
No spirit saw I thus toward God proud,
Not even he who from high walls was cast.

He went away, nor spake he words aloud;
And I saw then a Centaur full of ire
Come and call: “Where ’s this sour shade taking shroud?”

Maremma has not, methinks, as many dire
Snakes, as the Centaur had atop his back
Up to where yields horse’s to man’s attire.

Behind his nape, on his shoulders made stack
With open wings a dragon; and this gave
Breaths of fire to all who cross’d its track.

“This is Cacus” said Virgil “who in a cave
Under mount Aventino dwelt, whose floor
Ofttimes with lakes of blood he us’d to pave.

He ‘s not with his own kind we saw afore
’Cause with fraud the large herd he took away
That near his den Hercules kept in store;

For which the hero’s club gave him due pay,
Making him end any deceitful deed
With hundred blows, where ten could well him slay.”

While he spake, and beyond passed with speed
Cacus, three shades below our bridge came near,
Of whom Virgil and I fail’d to take heed,

Until they shout’d: “Who are ye up here?”,
At which our talk was halted, and we paid
Attention to them only, keen to hear.
Among them didn’t I know any shade;
But, as happens, it came to pass by chance
That of one then the other the name said,

Asking: “Where did Cianfa leave us?” In stance
Of man for silence calling then I went,
Finger to nose, looking my Duke askance.

If now, o reader mine, be thy intent
Slow to believe what I ’ll relate, by right
It ’s so, since hardly I trust my mind’s content.

As I am keeping on the shades my sight,
Lo! a six-legged snake leaps up to meet
One of them, upon him fastening tight.

His belly it grasped with the middle feet,
While with the pair in front the arms embrac’d,
Then it bit both the cheeks with fury and heat.

The hind paws to the shade’s thighs it enlac’d,
Between which then the tail insert’d, and back
Up through the loins its wavy motion trac’d.

Never did ivy cling to tree, nor pack
Its voids, as the horrid beast was seen to entwine
The shade’s limbs with its own, filling all crack.

As heated wax they melt’d; the borderline
Vanish’d, their colours mixing across it,
Either of them changing their look pristine,

In the same way as up a paper, lit
With fire, a brownish colour ‘s seen to advance
Where white dies, to be nam’d black not yet fit.

The two mates looked on with fearful stance,
Each crying: “Alas, what change, Agnello, I see!
Not one, nor twain is yet thy countenance.”

Already the two heads one seem’d to be,
When two figures in it appear’d confus’d,
In the face where the two were lost, to me.

The arms became twain limbs from four stripes fus’d;
The snake’s legs with man’s thighs and belly and breast
Into members were made on earth not us’d.

Any primal appearance there divest
Would they; both two and naught the foul image
Seem’d; and thus would proceed with gait unpress’d.

Then as lizard, below the oppressing cage
Of sun’s rays, in high summer, from one side

102
Of road flashes across to bush of sage,

Thus toward the other two appear’d to glide
A small serpent on fire, as pepper grain
Livid and black, their belly aiming to ride;

And on that point whence unborn babies gain
Their feeding, one of them it pierc’d away;
Then fell down and was still, before him lain.

The pierced look’d at it, but naught did say;
Rather he yawn’d, standing with fixed feet,
As man whom sleep or fever ‘s bound to lay.

The snake’s and his own gazes appear’d to meet;
He from the sore, and it from open snout
Sent out dense smokes, which at each other beat.

Lucanus hold his tongue, lest I should flout
What he of Sabellus and Naxidius tells,
For my own tale shall put his verse in rout;

And Ovidius boast not about the spells
Of Arethusa and Cadmus: if in spring
He turns her, him in snake, my song excels

His own, for he never a change could sing
Of two natures each other fronting, made
To be transform’d, thing into facing thing.

So respond’d one another snake and shade,
That the serpent its tail forkedly split,
And the wounded’s footmarks into one would fade.

The legs with thighs onto themselves clung fit,
Tight so, that in short time their joining space
By no outward sign was any longer lit.

The cleft tail was acquiring such old face
As the other side was losing, and its skin
Was made soft, while in front got scaly trace.

I saw the arms into the armpits drawn in,
And the snake’s two front paws, from their small look,
As much to grow as those went short and thin.

Then the hind feet, together twisted, took
The aspect of the member man keeps hid,
While the wretched his own for two forsook.

While over both the smoke made hazy lid
Of new colours, and caused hair to grow
On this, as that hairless mutation did,
The snake rose up, the man falling down low,
But they did not divert their godless stare,
Under which each of them was changing brow.

The upright being drew back its snout to where
The temples are, and from that fleshy excess
The cheeks sprout'd ears, of which they had been bare;

What had not run thus back, began to express
Forward the nose, and the lips' human pout,
Whose thickness had been formerly much less.

The fallen one forward extends the snout,
Inside its head drawing both ears, as steady
A snail would pull its horns in from without;

And its tongue, earlier on so whole and ready
To speak, splits up in two, the forked one
Closing its cleft; the smoke stays thick and heady.

The soul become a beast then took to run
Whistling across the valley, and the beast made
Into man behind it spat, and words spun.

New shoulders to the snake turned the shade,
And told the third: “I want Buoso to creep,
As I did, on his belly along this glade”.

Thus did I see the seventh valley’s keep
Change and transmute; and forbearance is due
If dimly through my words these new things seep.

And albeit those images much did subdue
My soul, and my eyes’ sight greatly confound,
Those two us’d not so covert words and few

That I had not Puccio the Cripple found
To be the only soul by change not pain’d
Among the three who earlier came around:

Gaville, thou for the other shade complain’d.
- Twenty-sixth Chant -

Rejoyce, Florence, in thy being so great
That on earth and on sea thy wings are stretched
And Hell's full of thy name, thy pride to sate!

Of thy citizens five found I so wretched
Among the thieves, that I must suffer shame,
And not much honour to thy name is fetched.

But if the morning dreams bear truthful fame,
Thou shalt, ere a short time is worn out, feel
What fate for thee Prato, and more cities, frame.

Nay, if already it were, not early seal
Would it be; let it pass, since so it must!
For the later the blow, 'th' harsher the deal.

We left the place, and on that stair-like crust
Of formerly descended rocky spikes
My leader climbed back, and I with trust

Followed; going along the lonesome hikes
Between the shards and boulders of the track
The foot without the hand hit faulty strikes.

I then was pain'd, as I am now, when back
In memory I look at what there lay
And my faculties strain and hold in check,

Lest they, by virtue unrulled, run astray,
Wishing to avoid by myself to make jest
Of what good Fate, or better, sent my way.

Many a peasant who takes well-earned rest
In season when the world-lighting prime mover
Its sight for longer time shews us, and best,

-At that hour when gnats from fly takes over,-
From uphill sees fireflies there down the vale
Just where he's wont to pick grapes and sow clover;

Thus from as many flames was light'd the pale
Of the eighth valley, as I was soon aware
When of its bottom I could spot the trail.

And as he who took vengeance with the bear
Saw the cart of Elias take off and leave
When the horses rear'd up, and want'd to stare,

But his eyesight could not follow its heave,
For nothing was discerned save the flame
That as a fiery cloud high up would weave,
Each flame down in that gulch mov’d in the same
Way, as in none was shewn what’s hid inside,
Though in each fire a sinner clothes his shame.

To look, over the bridge I stood astride,
So, had I not on a rock held safe ground,
I would, unpush’d, have fallen down the side.

And my leader, who saw me so spellbound,
“Inside those flames” then said “souls are contain’d,
And his own fire each one girds all around”.

“Master mine” answer’d I, “truth is attain’d
Through thy words; but already had I surmised
‘Twas so, and a request I had retain’d:

Who’s in that fire that comes in two excised
On the above, as they say burn’d from the pyre
Where with his brother Éteoclés was rised?”

“Chastise find” answer’d he “inside that fire
Ulysses and Diomedes; and to revenge
Thus together they’re going as to their ire;

And inside that one flame is wept the change
Achilles was forc’d to make, and wept the theft
Of the Palladium out of Troyan walls’ range.

And, more, it is lamented, in that cleft
Flame, the horse ambush, through which the gate
Was open’d whence Rome’s seed by Fate then left”.

“If from inside those live sparks either mate
Can speak” said I, “Master, I pray thee dear,
That may each pray of mine have tenfold weight,

Lest thou deny my waiting some time here
Until the forked flame this way shall come:
See how I’m leaning, eager to get near!”

And he: “Thy prayer’s worth of praise, not some,
Nay, more than that, and thus by me’s receiv’d;
But I bid thee thy tongue should mute become.

Let me speak, since enough have I conceiv’d
Thy intent; they unheeded would let fall,
As Greeks, perchance the words from thee perceiv’d”.

When the twin flame as near loom’d, bright and tall,
As my leader had deem’d proper and good,
In such form then I heard his address call:

“O ye who twain to a single flame give food,
If small or greater worth is in my note,
If some merit from ye I ever stood,

When in the world the lofty verse I wrote,
Don’t move on: nay, one of ye, pray, tell
Where him, lost, death at last joined and smote”.

The bigger horn of the ancient fire, where dwell
The two, began to shake with murmur low,
As flames strained by wind dwindle and swell;

Then motions to and fro its top would show,
As if it were a speaking tongue indeed,
And it sent forth a voice, words in a row:

“When I left Circe’s lair, who in her greed
Kept me more than a year in those sweet bays
Near Gaeta, so nam’d by Aenea’s deed,

Not my sweet son, nor human heart’s own ways
To an old father, nor late overdue love
For Penelope, arrear’d of long lost days,

Nothing could quench the fire that in me strove
To gain experience of the world, to see
How low men fall, what can they rise above;

But out I set for the high open sea,
With a lone wood and with that small hard core
Of friends, who chose not to desert from me.

Down on to Spain we coasted either shore,
Down on to Moorland, through the waves that pound
The Sardis’ island and a number more.

My friends and I were old, and felt downwound,
When we neared at last that narrow clyde
Where Hercules his markings set as bound,

So that farther no man should ever stride;
On our right hand Seville we chose to take,
Leaving Ceuta behind on the other side.

“Brothers”, I said, “safety you did forsake
So that we could this Western end attain;
Do not, I pray, deny what little wake

Your senses still before death’s sleep retain,
Such a wondrous experience, on the way
Trod by the Sun to the uninhabit’d plain!

Your seed and root consider, and don’t sway:
Made to live like the brutes you have not been,
But on course behind Virtue and Knowledge stay”.
My friends, by this short speech, made I so keen
Beyond the fateful gate to extend our flight,
That hardly to turn back could they be seen.

Our stern we point’d into the morning light,
A wing to that mad flight making each oar,
And on we plied, wide steering from the right.

From the other pole already more and more
New stars would rise, as the old ones would hide
So low, they fail’d to pierce the ocean’s floor;

The lamp that shines from under the moon’s side
Five times went up, and five again went down,
Since we dar’d undertake so lofty a ride,

When we sighted a mountain, hazy and brown
In the distance, and I deem’d it so high
That none I knew that more could pride its crown.

We took heart, and as soon it turn’d to cry,
For out of that new land a whirl came in,
Our foremost woodwork swiftly striking by.

Thrice with huge waves it made our vessel spin;
At the fourth turn high up our stern would strain,
And the prow sank, as One our will did win,

Till the waves upon us were seal’d again".
Twenty-seventh Chant

When the flame stood at last upright and still,
Talking no more, and from us went away,
In harmony with the sweet poet’s will,

The fire that behind it followed way
Made us turn our eyes to its top, because
From it a garbled sound was heard to stray.

As the Sicilian ox moo’d, for right cause,
From weeping of the crafty man who built
It, and whom first therein Phalaris close,

For the voice of the tortured out spill’d
So that, although from copper made, the beast
Seemed by piercing pains itself be fill’d;

Thus, not finding outlet at first, nor least
Opening in the pyre, in fire’s dumb tongue
The wretched words could only be releas’d.

But as they found their way up on the long
Sharp point, making it wriggle as, alive,
The tongue was wont to wriggle in its song,

We heard the words: “O thou to whom I strive
To address my voice, and whom I heard to speak
As lombard, when thou said: ‘No more I drive

Thee to talk; go’; I beseech thee, be meek
To converse aught, though I came late; thou see
How much, for all my burning, this I seek!

If thou in this blind world wert damn’d to be
Falling down from that sweet Italian land
Whence all my guilts I had to take with me,

Tell now if peace or war has upper hand
In Romagna; for from the mounts I came
That between Tiber source and Urbin stand.”

I was still bending, down fixing my aim,
When my leader touch’d me in the ribs and said:
“He’s Italian: thyself answer his claim”.

And I, who in my mind answer had made,
Without delay began thus to speak out:
“O in the fire down there thou hidden shade,

Romagna is not, nor ever was, without
War in the heart of tyrants who above reign;
But open strife I left not there, nor bout.
Ravenna is now as for long it has lain:
The eagle from Polenta guards such nest,
And Cervia under its wings is safe from rain.

The land put in the past to such long test,
That made of the French soldiers bloody mound,
Under green lion's claws has found its rest.

From Verrucchio both old and younger hound,
Who Montagna so badly rul'd, as wont
To make a gimlet of their teeth are found.

The cities that Santerno and Lamon front
Are ruled by the lion in white nest,
Who from summer to winter changes front.

And the town that by Savio is caress'd,
As it is sitting between mount and plain
So betwixt tyrant rule and freedom's press'd.

Now who thou art, prithee, to us make plain:
Be not more stubborn than others yet were,
May in the world thy name last without stain!"

After the flame had roar'd within its glare
As it was us'd, hither and thither bending
Its sharp point, breath'd such words out with hot air:

"If I should think my answer I were sending
To man who to the world could make return,
My flame would stay unshaken times unending;

But since never a soul sent here to burn
Went up alive again, if truth I heard,
I answer thee fearless of earthly spurn.

I bore a friar's string after the halberd,
Thinking, so girt, for all my sins to atone;
And rightly so chose I myself to gird,

Were it not for the high priest, rot to bone
Might he!, who put me back to my first guilt;
And how and why, I wish thou hear my tone.

While I wore shape of flesh and blood, as built
By mother mine, my deeds were never those
Of a lion's, but foxy in wile and tilt.

The cunning tricks and covert ways I chose
To learn all, and so did in them excel,
That to the farthest lands my fame arose.

When I saw myself come to that last spell
Of age, where ev'ry man should take in sail
And tie the rigs of his life's vessel well,
The course I lik'd turned to loathsome trail,
And, repent'd, a Grey Friar's cowl I wore;
O poor my soul! and well would it avail. 28

Near Laterano engag'd in battle sore
Was the prince of new Pharisees, and all
His enemies the flags of Christians bore:
No Saracens nor Jews pursued his fall,
Not one of his adversaries had been
To take Acri, or to trade in Sultan's hall; 30

Neither car'd he for his high office's sheen,
Nor for his holy orders, nor for mine
Which make all those so girt frugal and lean;
But, as leprosy made Constantin pine
And, to be cur'd, down from Soractes call
Sylvester, he call'd me to shew the line 32
To assuage his pride achieving his foes' fall:
He ask'd for my advice, and mute was I
'Cause his words seem'd with drunken fever tall.

He then said: 'Don't be wary to sin by
Thy words: I absolve thee from now, but tell
What, to beat Prenestino, should I try.
Heavens open I can, and seal as well,
As thou know; for two are the keys, indeed,
My predecessor spurned from his cell'. 35

Those arguments were weighty enough to lead
Me to speak, a worse choice silence appearing,
And I said: 'Father, since thou wash this deed
Of the sin which to commit I am fearing,
Long promise with short keeping shall thee make
Of the high seat hold firm possess and steering'. 37

As I was dead, Saint Francis came to take
Me; but one of the black cherubs then said
To him: 'Don't fetch this up, for justice sake.
He must needs join the knaves with deep pains paid,
Because he gave the fraudulent advice,
For which to his heels I ever since have stay'd; 39

No absolution is bought without the price
Of repentance; nor this with will can stay,
'Cause that entails a contradiction vice'. 40
O disgraceful me! How put away
Was I, when he took me, mocking: 'Maybe
Thou did not think such logics I could say!'

To Minos brought my soul: his tail coil'd he
Around his upright back eight times tight nested,
And angrily himself biting, 'Let be',

Said, 'in the thievish fire his soul's guilt tested',
For which here where thou seest I am thus lost,
And, clad in fire, I walk and cry unrested".

When of its tale it had thus told the most,
The plaintive flame took up its path again,
And, going, its sharp point twisted and toss'd.

Virgil and I went on beyond, on lane
Which up the rock, and then the bridge, makes road,
Over the ditch where those must bear hard pain

Who, having sown dissent, reap heavy load.
Twenty-eighth Chant

Whoever could, if in rhymeless words, express
Wholly the endless blood and sores I saw
Here, should he endless times such theme address?

Any tongue to this task, methinks, too raw
Would be, for human idioms’ lack of might
And for bounds that to our mind impos’d God’s law.

If all the folks were gather’d in full sight
Who painfully so much bled on the plains
Of fortune-toss’d Apulian land, in fight

For the Trojans and for the uncertain gains
Of the long war which so great spoil of rings
Gave, witness Livy whom no falsehood stains;

If with them stood all those who bloody stings
Suffer’d against Robert the Guiscard, and
The others, to whose bones still dirges sings

Ceperano, where ev’ry Apulian band
Broke faith; and those whom old Alardo slew
At Tagliacozzo with unarmed hand;

And if all these here pierced limbs would shew,
There cut-off members, no such sight could be
Found to attain the ninth pit’s foul way and new.

No barrel which has lost a stave we see
Split open, as I saw a shade be cleft
From his chin down to where we shed our scree:

Between his legs to dangle had been left
The bowels; with the offal the foul sack
Was seen which to make shit of food is deft.

While he held all my heed, he looked back
At me, rending his chest with his own hands,
And saying: “See how I spread wide this crack!

See how Mohammed ’s crippled in these lands!
Ali before my steps goes shedding tears,
Cleft in face from the chin up to headbands.

Each sowed scandal, or wielded schism’s shears,
In their life, of the other shades thou see
Here, and each therefore such maiming fears.

Behind this place a fiend is pois’d to be
Our cruel dresser, to his sword’s sharp cut
Now and again submitting all whom he
Meets, when the wretch'd turn a full circle; but
Our grievous wounds shall become close, and heal
Ere again leads to him our dismal rut.

Now who art thou, looking with idle zeal,
The time, methinks, to delay of thy pain
For thy charges ordain'd with Minos' seal?"

"Neither did reach him Death, nor God's disdain
Brings him here" said my lord "to be tormented;
But so that he fuller experience gain,
It behoves my dead self to make augmented
His wit, through Hell leading him pit to pit,
And this is true as my speech 's unrelented."

More than a hundred in that ditch saw fit,
Such words hearing, to halt and look at me
Amaz'd, forgetting how their torments bit.

"Now tell brother Dolcino how well should he
Arm himself, thou who shalt yet see the sun,
If he wants to avoid here following me.
Victuals should he get, lest snowy run
Bring victory to his Novara foe,
Who could not otherwise his ramparts stun."

Standing with raised foot ready to go,
These words utter'd Mohammed, who then let
The foot down, and departed full of woe.

Another with slit throat nearer would get,
His nose cut off up to under his brow,
Having but one lone ear, eagerly set
To look at me, as such wonder to know
Look'd all the others, first of whom he spoke
From his windpipe all red from the blood flow:

"O thou whom does not weigh evil deed's yoke,
And whom I saw on fair Italian land,
Methinks, so well-known traits thy semblance woke,
Memory of Pier da Medicina at hand
Call, if thou shalt again see the sweet plain
Stretching to sea from Piedmont, in slope bland.

And to the two best Fano men make plain,
To Angiolello and sir Guido, that -if here
Our foreknowledge of future is not vain-
Out of their vessel they shall be thrown clear
Near Cattolica and sunk, loaded with stones;
Betrayal by fell tyrant they should fear.

Between Majorca and Cyprus no bygones
Ever shew’d to king Neptune such a wrong;
No pirate, no Greek knave for this atones.

Holds the land that a shade near me, among
All these, had better never having seen,
The traitor with one eye, who before long

Shall call those two to a meeting; sly and mean
He will ensure that them, then, neither vow
Nor prayer from Focara wind need screen.”

And I to him: “Show and declare, pray, how
And who is that with such a bitter sight,
If thou wish me to heed thy wishes now”.

He then to the other’s mouth put his own right,
And forcedly the clenched jaws pried wide,
Shouting: “This is the soul, tongue cut in spite.

He was cast out from Rome, and brush’d aside
Caesar’s doubts, by asserting that the ready
Harm always suffer when their time they bide.”

Alas, how much dismay’d look’d and unsteady
Showing the sawed-off tongue in his throat
Curio, who gave so bold a speech and heady!

And another, his face red of foul coat
Of blood from stumps he rais’d in the dark air,
For both hands had away from him been brought,

Shouted: “Thou shalt recall Mosca in despair,
I who said, alas! ‘What is done can naught
Be undone’, bad seed for all Tuscany fair”.

And added I: “Death for thy folks it bought”;
For which he, sorrow heaping upon pain,
Wander’d away as mad soul and distraught.

But I remained there, to watch the vain
Throng, and I saw such thing that should give fright
Even to tell, without fair proof and plain;

Were it not that my conscience puts me right,
The good company that a man makes free
Under the shield of feeling clean from blight.

I saw indeed, and still it seems I see,
A trunk without the head to walk and bear,
As walk’d the other wretched all round me,
And the severed head hold by its hair,
To dangle from his hand as if a light
It were; and it watch'd us, and said: "Despair!"

Of himself to himself he made lamp bright,
And two in one and one in two they were:
How that can be, He knows who holds all might.

He came right down to the bridge's foot, and there
Rais'd high the arm with the severed head,
To bring his voice near through the noisy air,

And said: "See now the torment fraught with dread,
Such that no other can be deem'd as deep,
O thou who with live breath visit the dead.

And learn, that thou of me memory keep
In the world, how Bertrand de Bornes here goes,
Who did in bad advice the young King steep.

Father and son to each other I made foes;
Achitophel to Absalom no more,
And to David, with bad counsel brought woes.

'Cause such folks I divided and made sore,
My brain, alas!, I carry split away
From its root which resides in this trunk's core.

Thus works in me the retaliation way".
The diverse folks and many scourges had so
My lights with tears made overbrimming, that
I want'd to stop and weep along; but “O,”

Virgil told me, “what art thou looking at?
Why does thy sight still dwell at length upon
Those mangled shades down there so sadly sat?

Never in the other vales thou wert so won:
Think, if thou care to reckon it, that miles
Two and twenty this valley circles on,

And that the moon nether has gone the whiles;
Scarce is running the time we are endow'd
With, and more 's to be seen than those wretch'd files.”

“Had I of my long looking clearly show'd",
Answer'd I, “what the cause had been, thou would
Willingly have my stay perchance allow'd.”

He was going the while, and I with good
Intention with his pace follow'd my say,
Adding: “Within that ditch methinks there stood,

Where my gaze was just now seeking its way,
A soul born of mine blood, weeping the guilt
That so harshly down there binds him to stay”.

Then my master: “No longer let be fill'd
Thy thought henceforth with the pain he 's enjoin'd:
Attend to other things, while there he ’s still'd:

‘Cause I saw him down that small bridge to point
At thee his finger, threatening in mood;
Geri del Bello's name to him was join'd.

So wholeheartedly then attend thou would
To the lord of Hautefort therein restricted,
Thou paid not heed; he there no longer stood.”

“O my leader, the bloody death inflicted,
Unavenged”, said I, “by no man still
Who of the offence partook of that afflicted,

Full of disdain made toward me his will;
For that, I think, unspoken he departed,
And this with greater pity does me fill.”

So spake we as far as where first imparted
Would be the sight from edge to lower pit,
Had therefrom more light the darkness parted.
As we came to the last enclosure, fit
To contain Evilpit's cloistered dead,
Wherefrom their view could well enough be lit,

Diverse complaints' harsh darts went round my head,
That not with iron, but arm'd with pity flew;
For which my hands to strained ears up fled.

As much pain would one meet, if joined grew
Until September from July the ills
That Tuscan and Sardinian wards imbue,

As in that ditch one would have found; and spills
Out of it such a stink, as of the rotten
Limbs is wont to be smelt out from those sills.

On left hand still we went, till we had gotten
Down to the foremost brink of the long rock,
And then a sharper view was there begotten

Toward the bottom, where under harsh lock
The unfailing justice of the exhalted Lord
Has forgers kept who the true metals mock.

Not greater sadness ever touch'd heart's chord,
Methinks, seeing in Aegina all folks sick
-When the air was with health so much discord,

That all beasts, down to small worms, Death would pick
And afterwards the ancients, so we read
As firm belief of poets, had to stick,

To grow again, to ants' brood in their plead -
Than was in seeing through the dark vale sore
Languish in varied groups the wretched seed.

Some on their bellies, some were stretch'd in gore
Over each other's back; some through the sad
Ground were dragging their persons on all four.

Step over step we went, in silence clad,
With eye and ear to the sick intent,
Who could not rise, they were stricken so bad.

Two I saw sitting, on each other leant,
As pan to baking pan is overlain,
From head to foot their skin with sore scabs rent;

Never saw I with currycomb to strain
Stable boy waited by his master, nor
Someone who rather go to sleep would fain,

As oft himself each with his nails bit, for
The rabid torment of the smarting itch
No solace anymore can find, pause nor;

And so the nails tore down with frantic pitch
The scabies, as from tench a knife the scales
Tears, or from fish that wider mail would stitch.

“O thou sore mail divesting with thy nails,”
Begins my leader one of them to address
Who of fingers as tongs sometimes avails,

“Would forever endure, to scrape that mess,
Thy claws; but tell us, pray, whether with those
Herein, does any Italian share distress.”

“Italian both of us are, who morose
Thou seest so wasted here,” answers in tears
One of them; “but who art thou in this close
Looking for us?” And he: “Soul who no fears
Entertains to descend from pit to pit,
And this live soul, to show him Hell, here steers”.

Their mutual leaning at this word they quit;
And trembling each of them then turned face
To me, with others who by chance heard it.

The good master nearer to me took place,
Saying: “Tell them whatever thou best like”;
And I began, to follow his will’s trace:

“Oblivion may your memory not strike
In the first world, within the living’s mind,
And long time may your fame avoid dislike;

But tell me who ye are and from what kind:
Let not your sordid and annoying pain
From disclosing yourselves keep ye in bind”.

“From Arezzo I hail; to fire in chain
Albero the Senese put me” one said;
“But that for which I died does not retain
Me here. It’s true in jest I him mislaid
Saying: ‘I could rise in flight through the thin air’;
And he, who curious was -and witless- made,
Want’d to be shewn how to mount on such stair;
Daedalus I could not make him; and then
I mount’d the pyre through his father’s care.

But to this last dark vale out of the ten
I was sent for the alchemy I wrought
By Minos, who fails not to choose right den.”
And I told Virgil: “Now can there be aught
Vainer folks than are those in Siena born?
Surely the French can be compar’d for naught!”

And the other leper, who had heard my scorn,
Riposted: “Stricca, who so thrifty expense
Was wont to make, is from that list best torn,

As well as that Nicholas, who had pretence
Of first using the clove in rich repast,
In the orchard such seed had sprouted whence;

And out be left the crowd in which at last
Squander’d Caccia d’Ascian his vine and wood,
And Abbagliato’s great wit’s show was cast.

But so that thou may know who shares thy mood
To the Senese adverse, strain thine eye,
So that my face answer to thee give could:

Thus shalt thou see Capocchio’s shade am I,
Who metals with my alchemy have fak’d:
And thou’ll recall, if well I reckon by,

How well I monkey’d ores by Nature bak’d”.
When for Semeles Juno was in rage
Against the Theban folks, as it was shown
Several times with evil vengeance's wage,

Atamant so much out of wit was thrown,
That on seeing his wife in arms to carry
Both sons, by him their semblance was not known;

Nay, he shouted: “Let’s cast the nets, nor tarry,
That this lioness with her cubs I catch”;
His stretch’d merciless claws they could not parry:

The son named Learcos he would snatch,
And whirl him, and knock him against a stone;
She drown’d herself and son, to grief sad match.

And when Fortune had turn’d to ash and bone
The Trojans’ lofty might that dar’d all fate,
Leaving kingdom and king utmost undone,

Wretched Hecuba, sad, in shackled state,
Her daughter Polyxena having seen dead,
And Polydorus’ corpse thrown down in hate
On the seashore perceiv’d, lost her head,
And, raving, howled as can howl a bitch;
So much by grief out of her mind was led.

But no fury from Thebes or Troy, nor witch
Ever was seen so in others cruel to be,
Nor wound beasts, if not men, as in that ditch

Two livid naked shades were seen by me
Run about and all others bite, as boar
Is wont to do when from pigsty runs free.

One of them reach’d Capocchio, and him down bore
Sinking his teeth in the other’s nape, and tearing;
The fallen’s belly on the hard ground scrap’d sore.

And the Aretine, who stay’d shaking and fearing,
Told me: “That sprite as Gianni Schicchi is known,
And in his rabid course maims all he’s nearing”.

“O”, said I then, “the other never thrown
May have sharp teeth on thee, don’t now be late
To name that shade, ere farther course has flown.”

And he: “There goes the ancient soul irate
Of wick’d Myrrha, who to her father became,
Out of any right love, in love cognate.
To sin with him in such attire she came,
As to make her disguis’d in feigned form,
As the other there usurped look and name
Of sir Buoso Donati, and in good norm
Made out his will in false pretence, to gain
His leading mare; for which so here must storm.”

When beyond us had pass’d the two insane
On which I kept my gaze fixed, on more
Ill-begot I turn’d it, and on their bane.

A shade saw I who of lute the semblance wore,
Had his groin been cut off from what below
In man’s figure forks out; such bloating bore.

The weighty hydrops, by which dissembling grow
Man’s limbs for humour badly inside converted,
Since face and belly disproportion show,

Made him his lips hold open, breath exerted,
As the feverish man, who from thirst keeps
One lip down to his chin, one up reverted.

“O ye who wander through the painful heaps
And seem, I don’t know why, no torments have,”
Said he, “see and behold what pain here reaps

The unlucky soul of Adam, master knave:
When alive, I was granted all my wills,
And now, alas!, a drop of water crave.

The fair brooks that proceed from the green hills
Of Casentino, in Arno down to flow,
Keeping so moist and cool their gentle rills,

Not in vain ever stand before my brow:
For their image dries up my cheeks not less
Than the illness by which so lean they grow.

The strict justice that searches my distress
From the place where I sinned draws fair ground
To put wings to my sighs under duress.

There lies Romena, where the way I found
To forge the alloy with John the Baptist’s seal,
For which to burn at stake then I was bound.

But, should I see these pains the shadows feel
Of Guido or Alexander or their kin,
Fonte Branda in exchange would be fair deal.
One of them here yet dwells, if true words spin
The rabid shades roaming all time around;
But what avails this me, tied and bound in?

Lighter were I that much, an inch of ground
Could in one hundred years walk over, I
Already would my path through Hell have found,

Trying his shade in this foul throng to spy,
Though this circle eleven miles runs long,
And all of half a mile wide seems to lie.

For those folks to this family I belong:
They led me to mint faked florin coins
Which by three carats of refuse were wrong.

And I: “Who are the two wretched, whom joins
Fate to thy right-hand borders, letting out
Smoke, as wet hands in winter, from their loins?”

“Here I found them -nor later mov’d about-”
Answer’d he, “when I rain’d to this defile,
And them ever to move their limbs I doubt.

She ’s the woman who accus’d Joseph in bile,
And the man the false Sinon, bane of Troy:
High fever makes them throw such vapour vile.”

And the Greek liar felt such great annoy,
Methinks, to get this dark repute of scum,
That with a fist struck him of false alloy,

Whose taut belly resounded as a drum;
And master Adam the other’s face a blow
Dealt with his arm, not less hard down to come,

Saying: “Although my limbs so heavy grow
That I ’m condemned not to move, for sure
My arm to this riposte is not too slow”.

To this Sinon: “When thou wert going to endure
The fire, it was,” then said “indeed, less fast;
As much and more, though, to mint coins impure”.

And the hydropic: “Thou speak truth now at last:
But thou gave not true witness in that age
When through thy sly deceit Troy’s fate was cast”.

“If a lie did I tell, thou forg’d mintage”
Said Sinon, “and for one fault here I dwell;
But more than any devil’s fill thy page!”

“Recall the horse, perjurer, and be well
Sorry that thy vile fame by all is known!
The pot-bellied with rage haster'd to tell.

“And may thee sorrow bring the thirst well shown
By the cracks on thy tongue,” the Greek on went,
“And the foul water that thy belly has blown!”

Then the coiner: “Not otherwise is rent
Thy mouth, as ever will, by fever dread;
If I thirst, and my lymph into bloat went,

Burning illness thou hast, and aching head;
And to the licking of Narcissus’ glass
Thou would not many words want to be led”.

I was intent to hear what next would pass,
When my lord said to me: “Look on thy fill!
I should quarrel with thee, for being so crass”.

To his angry words I turn'd, confus'd in will,
Cringing within myself for such deep shame,
That in my mind renews its flooding still.

As man who dreams his harm, and in that same
Dream wishes to be dreaming, so that he
Craves what is true to take of dream the name,

Thus, unable to speak, I seem'd to be:
I want'd to apologize, and did in look
Ask pardon, which I thought not ask'd by me.

“Small shame can wash a greater sin” then took
To say Virgil, “than thine was; and therefore
Be as the man who all sad thoughts forsook:

I ’ll be at thy side, should it happen that more
Occasions come when Fortune lead thee must
Where folks take up such quarrel as before:

’Cause wanting to hear that is lowly lust.”
Thirty-first Chant

One and the same sharp tongue first me had bit,
To one and th’other cheek deeper hue lending,
And then gave me the medicine most fit:

Thus I read how that weapon badly offending,
Achilles’ and his father’s spear, was writ
To give first harm, and then wholesome mending.

We turn’d our back to the sorrowful pit
Upward to the dyke’s tip that round is set,
To cross it, without speaking the least bit.

Here less than night, and less than day we met,
So that my sight not far forward could go;
A horn’s loud blow, however, then was let,

Such that a thunder hoarser would sound, and low;
And, following against its course its trail,
My eyes were pull’d to the source of the blow.

After the painful rout in Roncisvale,
When Charlemagne his holy ranks had lost,
Not so dreadfully Roland sound’d his wail.

Little had I farther my forehead toss’d,
When, thinking towers were there seen stand tall,
I asked: “Lord, what land such spires can boast?”

And he: “Too far away thine eyes now call
Through this dark air: it’s a foregone event
Thy imagining far from truth must fall.

Thou ‘ll see, if nearer there thy pace is sent,
How much thy senses are thus far deceiv’d;
Therefore some more be goaded thy intent.”

Then endearingly his hand mine hand receiv’d,
And added he: “Ere we still farther stride,
So as the thing be not too weird perceiv’d

By thee, learn there rise giants round the side
Of the pit, and not towers; and they stand
Stuck there from navel down, high-flung and wide”.

Like when, the fog dissolving, is the land
Little by little reveal’d to the gaze
As the vapours wane thinner strand by strand,

Thus burrowing through dense infernal haze
My sight, to the brink closer, with cold fear,
As the error faded, my numb mind would daze;
‘Cause as Montereggione, on lone rock spear,
Stands by towers along its round wall crown’d,
Thus round the pit along the rim now near

Were towering by half their person, bound
From waist down, the horrid giants, by
Jove still from sky threaten’d, when thunders sound.

Already of some of them the face saw I,
The breast and shoulders and of belly a good part,
And both arms down the mighty ribs to lie.

Nature for sure, when she forsook the art
Of such unruly beings, adjust’d her scales
Well, choosing thus of Mars to blunt the dart.

And if now still in elephants and whales
She prides herself, when thou with sharp wit look
Thou shalt hold just and balanc’d all her trails;

For where the reason of ill-will partook
And of the body’s might, not safe ‘s to hide
In shelter, nor help ‘s found in any book.

The face I saw seemed as long and wide
As Saint Peter’s pinecone in Rome, and fit
To such proportions was the trunk beside;

So that the cliff, that loincloth was to it
From navel down, shew’d to us so much
Above, that to reach his hair misfit

Would be three Frisians head to feet in touch;
Indeed, I saw of him thirty good spans
Without mantle, from where men buckle such.

“Raphael may ameck zabee almans”
Began to intone loud those fierce lips, which well
It behov’d sweeter psalms to give the bans.

And my leader: “Fool denizen of Hell,
Be content with thy horn, and but that sound,
When anger, or some other feeling, tell!

Seek near thy neck, and thou shalt find there round
The strap from which it hangs, thou badly built,
And see how both thy ingent breast surround.”

Then to me: “By himself denounce his guilt
He must: Nimrod is this, for whose ill thought
No more a single tongue has the world fill’d.

Leave him alone is best, and tell him naught;
For such each language is to him, as his
To others, that no one understands aught.”
We toiled thus for longer path, from this
To left hand side; and at an arrow’s throw
A taller, fiercer giant couldn't miss.

By whom was he so shackled, I don't know;
But he had his left arm in front, and back
The right, both bound as taut as string of bow

By a chain which was girding him from neck
Downward, so that on his emerging trunk
'Twas coil'd at least as far as the fifth stack.

“This haughty soul so with his might was drunk
That against supreme Jove put it to test”
My leader said “and thus he gain'd this bunk.

Fialtes is his name; he fought his best
When the giants struck fear to Gods on high:
The arms he whirl'd around, ever shall rest.”

“If as much is allowed” then said I,
“Fain would I with mine eyes apprize the sight
Of disproportion'd Briareus nearby”.

Answer'd he: “Thou shalt see Antaeus by right
Not far from here; unshackled, he can talk,
And shall depose us down where dwells all blight.

He whom thou wish to see needs longer walk,
And, shackled, same as this appears in look,
Except that fiercer face to him I chalk.”

Never as strong a wrecking earthquake shook
High tower, as Fialtes at this thought
Was fast to shake, so that great fright I took,

And with death's dread more than ever was caught;
And to die naught was needed more than fear,
Had I not seen how stout the chain was wrought.

Further on we proceeded then, and near
Came to Antaeus who, not counting head, stood tall,
Out of the pit, methinks five fathoms sheer.

“O thou who as thy prey once carried all
Of thousand lions, there in the lucky plain
Where Scipio inherit'd glory for the fall

Of Carthage town, when Hannibal in vain
Fought; thou who, had to thine brothers lent hand
In th' high war, to earth's sons would have the gain

Methinks gone; put us down, to that low land
Where Cocitus the frozen reign encloses;  
Have no disdain thy might for this to lend.  

Not Titius nor Typhoeus the way discloses,  
If thou shalt; bend down, then, don't turn away.  
Of what here 's crav'd this one on earth disposes:  

He can still in the world open the way  
To thy fame; he 's alive, and long years more  
Shall be, if otherwise high Grace won't say.”

So spake the master; and Antaeus to fore  
In haste his hands thrust -Virgil up to take-  
Whose grasp Hercules felt to his inner core.  

My leader, when he saw Antaeus to make  
Such move, told me: “Come nearer, so I can  
Grab thee” and up we bundled, for our sake.  

As, below Garisenda tower, man  
Looking up on the leaning side, when cloud  
Against it goes, sees falling that high span,  

Such then seemed to me the giant proud  
When I watch'd him to bend, and truly I would  
More willingly other mount have then allow'd.  

But on the bottom, where is maim'd the brood  
Of Lucifer and Judas, did depose  
Us lightly Antaeus; nor he so bent there stood,  

But, as rises a vessel's mast, up rose.
Thirty-second Chant

Were my voice harsh and hoarse verses to intone,
   As it would well behave the dismal ring
Upon which leans every higher stone,

I could more aptly from my thoughts out wring
The sap; but, since my rhymes have no such sound,
Not without fear I force myself to sing;

For to describe the cosmos’ bottom ground
Is not endeavour to be lightly meant,
Nor is for it a childish tongue apt found:

But would those women help my verse, who lent
To Amphion help when he girt Thebes with wall,
So that my say from truth should not dissent.

O foul rabble in birth more wick’d than all,
Dwelling in place of which is hard to tell!
Better be born in sheeps’, or in goats’, stall.

As we had been let down in the dark well
Just at the Titan’s feet, but low much more,
And over the high cliff my gaze still fell,

I heard someone tell me: “Look out, before
Stepping on, and take care lest thou should tread
On the heads of us wretched brothers sore”.

At that I turn’d, and in front of my head
And underneath my soles, a lake I saw
Whose waters look’d, for frost, crystal instead.

To its course never thicker veil, in raw
Winter, the Danube got in Austria, nor
The Don under the skies that do not thaw,

As here the ice, which would not splinter for
Slide of an Apuan alp, or heavier land;
Nay, no creak would it give, even at shore.

And as the frogs, to make their croaking, stand
With their snouts out of water, when in sleep
Still seems to glean the peasant woman’s hand;

Thus stood, livid, in freezing ice stuck deep
Up to where shame is shewn, each sorry shade,
From whom stork-like teeth clicking marks their weep.

Each of them held the face downcast; each bade
With mouth the cold, and with eyes its sad heart;
Of pain such witness bears the frozen glade.
When I had gaz’d around toward all part,
I look’d down at my feet, where two shades pin’d
So join’d, their hair my sight could not compart.

“Tell me, o ye whose breasts so are entwin’d,”
Said I, “who are ye?” They bent up their neck,
And when they had their face to mine align’d,
Their eyes, whose tears had flown yet without check,
Sent drops down to the lips, and frost, made tight
All humour, clench’d every exposed speck.

Wood to wood iron bar with greater might
Never joined; for which, as bucks, they bang’d
Together, won by anger blind and spite.

Another shade, earless for frost, head hang’d
Downward still, spake and said: “Why art thou so
Eager to mirror thee in folks thus pang’d?
If the names of those two thou wish to know,
Learn that Albert, their father, and both those
Own’d the land where Bisenzio waters flow.

Of a womb they were born; search close, as close
Thou can, all of Caina, thou shalt see
No soul more aptly frost holds in that pose;
Not he whose breast and shadow were to be
Pierc’d with a single blow by Arthur’s hand;
Not Focaccia, nor this close by, to me
Impeding sight with the head, in his land
Called with Sassol Mascheroni’s name;
Tuscan thou art, well must thou know his stand.

And so that longer speech I should not frame,
Learn that I Camicion de’ Pazzi have been;
I wait Carlino, to assuage my shame.”

A thousand faces then, purple or green
From the cold, saw I there; loath shall I be,
Therefore, ever to ford like iced sheen.

And while toward the middle point went we
To which every weight from all sides tends,
And shivers for the eternal frost shook me,
Be it for will or chance that fate portends,
I cannot say; but of those heads in one
Strong hits my foot, while in between it wends.

Crying he chided me: “Why in me run?
Unless thou come the more to avenge the guilt
Of Montaperti, why my head thus stun?

And I: “My master, till my doubt be fill’d
On this who speaks, deign here for me to wait;
As much I ‘ll rush on, then, as by thee will’d”.

My leader then consent’d to halt his gait,
And the stricken, still swearing hard, I told:
“Who art thou, who other people curse in hate?”

“Thy own name declare rather, thou who cold
Anthenora tread, striking people’s cheeks,
So that, were thou alive, ‘twere too bold!”

“Alive am I, and if some fame still seeks
Thy soul” answer’d I then, “thou shalt have dear
That in my notes a verse thy name too speaks.”

And he: “Contrarywise I wish; so, near
Don’t stay to me, but cease with words to allure,
For ill knowst thou how best to entice us here!”

Then I took him by scruff of neck, for sure
Threatening: “I shall peel off all thy hair,
If thy name in not telling thou so endure”.

Counter’d he: “Should all naked to cold air
Remain my scalp, my name I ‘ll never tell,
Nor I ‘ll show me; thy blows for naught I care”.

I had his mane already in hand seiz’d well,
And a handful of locks had torn away
While he howl’d, eyes downcast, when in that spell

Another shade shout’d out: “Bocca, why bay?
Is not enough thy jaws sound all the time,
Without howling? What devil came thy way?”

“No longer” said I “need I hear thy rhyme,
Evil traitor; be assur’d that of thy shame
Truthful news shall I make, up on earth, chime.”

“Go away,” answer’d he, “and of my name
Sing what thou like; but, should thou flee from here,
Don’t forget him whose tongue was not now lame.

He ‘s from Duera, and French silver weeps he near;
‘I saw’ thy verse can say ‘Buoso in the lair
Where the traitorous sinners fresh wind fear’.

And, should thou then be ask’d: ‘Who more was there?’,
See at thy side from Beccheria the man
Whose throat the axe of Florence did not spare.
Gianni de' Soldanieri, I think, thou can
With Gano and Tebaldello farther see,
Who at night flung wide Faenza postern's span.”

From him already parted, then saw we
Together in a hole frozen two dead,
So that one to the other cap could be:

And as for hunger can be eaten bread,
So, where the brain with the nape is conjoin'd,
Th' upper shade put his teeth to the other's head:

Not otherwise Tideus, feeling in point
Of death, gnawed Menalippus' temples sore,
As this shade gnaw'd that skull with all there join'd.

"O thou shewing through such a beastly score
Thy hate for him whom thou devour in spite,
I promise, if thou tell the why before,

That, should the reason of thy plaint be right,"
Said I, "knowing your names and his misdeed,
Up in the world I shall make clear thy plight,

Or may dry up this tongue with which I plead.”
Thirty-third Chant

The mouth then raised from his feral meal
That sinner, wiping it against the mane
Of the nape he laid waste to with such zeal.

Then he began: “Most desperate 's the pain
Pressing my heart, thou ask me to renew
Telling, ere nary a word can make it plain.

But if my tale should sow even a few
Seeds to spring shame on the traitor I gnaw,
To speak and weep at once I shan’t eschew.

I know not who thou art, nor to this raw
Spot how thou came, but in thy clothes and speech
Thou really seemst to follow Florence's law.

Earl Ugolino I was, whom men impeach,
And as Ruggieri, archbishop, did this live;
Why such neighbour I am I 'll thee now teach.

How, for the evil thoughts he did conceive,
I was caught, trusting him, and then was kill'd,
Is so well known, aside I can this leave;

But thou can't know, because my voice was still'd,
How cruel was my death, and how offending;
This thou shalt hear, and be with pity fill'd.

Small opening is there, in that heart-rending
Dungeon from hunger better taking name
In which more folks behoves to find their ending,

Through which moon's wax and wane already came
Many a time, when the dismal dream I dream'd
That of our future fate disclos'd the frame.

This one hunt-leader and true master seem'd
Chasing the wolf and cubs toward the hill
For which is Lucca from Pisa disseam'd.

He Gualandi and Visconti of eager skill,
And Lanfranchi, their hounds skinny with greed,
Had put up in the front, to lead the kill.

In a short course, of rest much look'd in need
Father and sons, and by the sharp fangs dread
It seem'd their sides were slit with fiendish speed.

When I woke up ere morning light was shed,
My sons, who were with me, still in their sleep
Moaning I heard, and asking me for bread.
Cruel must thou be, if thou don't stir down deep
Thinking of what my troubled heart portended:
And, if this can't, what else shall make thee weep?

They were awake, and the day now extended
To when we should receive some feeding stock,
And for his dream each of us lay suspended;

When I heard someone, down, bolting the lock
Of the horrid tower; so I turn'd to stare
To my sons' face, as speechless as a rock.

So I went to stone, I shewed not despair:
But they would weep: and Anselmuccio cried:
"Thou look at us so, Father! What is there?"

Thus I made no complaint, nor I replied
During light, nor when night followed day,
Till a new sun shone on the world outside.

When in that sorry dungeon wound its way
A pale sunbeam, and fourfold in that light
My own countenance saw I wast'd away,

Both my hands out of sorrow did I bite;
And they, thinking that hunger was the cause,
Promptly stood up, and "Father", they said, "quite

Less painful would it be, should thou dispose
Of this poor flesh of ours, that thou clad
Us with, and may divest, if thou so chose".

I quieted then, lest I make them more sad;
That day, and all the next, we sat in gloom;
Hard earth, why didst thou not split wide thy bed?

When the night to a fourth day was making room,
Gaddo himself to my feet flung and held tight,
Crying: "Father mine, why lift thou not my doom?"

Here he died; and, as thou beholdst my sight,
Saw I the three of them fall, one by one,
The fifth day and the sixth; and then, all light

Gone from my eyes, I went to grope and run
Over them, calling them two days yet more;
Till, what sorrow could not, starving had done."

This once said, with a squinting glance and sore
He took again to the maim'd skull, with teeth
Which as strong as a hound's went to the core.

Ah Pisa, in which all blames gather and seethe
Of the fair country where the "sì" resounds,
Since neighbours slow chastise to thee bequeath,

Capraia with Gorgona leave their bounds
Should, and at Arno’s mouth thereafter set,
So that all persons drown in thy low grounds!

For, if Earl Ugolino even should get
The blame for giving thy castles away,
To such trial his sons thou must not let.

Innocent, city steep’d in Thebe’s way,
Their tender age made the four sons he lost:
Brigata, Uguccio and the two above I say.

We pass’d beyond, where the everlasting frost
More folks is wrapping in its rough embrace;
Not face-down, but supine lies this sad host.

Their very weeping to their grief cuts pace,
For the tears, on ic’d lids not finding way,
Turn inside and increase their deep disgrace;

‘Cause the first frozen moistures keep at bay
Further flow, and as crystal vizard fill,
Under the brow, the orbits’ hollow tray.

And although, for the extreme of cold, all still
My senses in my face had grown already,
As happens for indured skin’s hard sill,

I seem’d to feel some wind blowing on steady:
For which I: “Master mine” said, “this who impels?
Is not down here all vapour made unready?”

And he: “Soon thou shalt be where doubts dispels
Thy eye, from which answer receive thou must,
Seeing what cause this frozen breath propels”.

And one of the wick’d souls in the cold crust
Shout’d at us: “O ye cruel shades, so wretched
That you re allott’d the congeal’d lowest dust,

Aught from my face these veils, pray, get unfetched,
So that I can give vent to heart-soaking pain,
Some time, ere them again the frost gets stretched”.

And I: “If thou want help to thy complain,
Tell who thou art, and if thee I don’t clean,
May I go to the bottom of this plain”.

Thereon he answer’d: “From the orchard mean
I am known; Alberigo was my name;
Dates for figs here I get, as thou hast seen”.

Since neighbours slow chastise to thee bequeath,
“Oh!” said I, “not yet dead calls thee thy fame!”
And he: “Of how my body in the world stays
Presently, all knowledge here is blind and lame.

This circle Tolomea such vantage pays,
That oftentimes the soul is here made slave
Ere Atropos the mortal life’s thread frays.

And so that thou more willingly should shave
The tears glass’d-over from my frozen face,
Know yet that as the soul betrays, the knave

Has a devil take up his body, and pace
All its motions, till all the time is spent
That in the world should last its lifelike trace.

The soul to this deep pit, instead, is sent;
And methinks is the body still up there
Of such, to whom this wintry place is lent.

He ‘s Branca d’Oria, behind me; thou fair
Knowledge should have, since thus low thou went;
Many a year did yet pass, he ‘s in this lair.”

“Methinks” I said, “deceitful voice thou vent;
For Branca d’Oria is yet alive and well,
And to wear clothes, eat, drink and sleep is meant.”

“In Evilgrips’ hot ditch” said he “where smell
Canst thou the sticky pitch that ever boils,
Michael Zanche not yet had come to dwell,

When this soul, and a mate in unjust broils
Of betrayal, left devils in their stead
In live bodies, and came here to freezing toils.

But now extend thy hand out to my head,
As sworn, and free my eyes.” And I refus’d;
And courtesy be rude was to such dead.

O Genoans, to diverse customs us’d,
Full of the world’s malicious faults, I wonder,
Why are ye not throughout the orb confus’d?

‘Cause with Romagna’s worst traitor, down yonder,
I found one of your land, who for his sins
In spirit wet and cold thoughts has to ponder,

And in body live semblance shows and spins.
The king of Hell shows forth, as flags, his wings
Toward us: look in front, and thy gaze throw;
Methinks thou canst discern those frightful things."

As, when thick fogs in winter swell and blow
Or when night overtakes our hemisphere,
From afar a windmill its vanes can show,

I thought I saw such a tall building here;
Then the wind made me take shelter behind
My leader; to none other could I steer.

I was now, and with dread this verse I grind,
Where overlain with ice is ev'ry shade,
Shining through ice, as sheen in glass straws find.

Some of them lie supine; others are made
To stand upright, or upside down, and some,
As bows bent over, head next to feet are laid.

When that much forward our steps had come
That of the creature with fair semblance born
Well distinct the new aspect had become,

In front of me my leader's screen was torn,
And, making me stop there, "Here's Dis" he said,
And here is fit all weakness to be shorn."

As I went then all hoarse and cold afraid,
Good reader, don't inquire, and I won't write,
'Cause any word is here powerless made.

I did not die, nor alive stay'd by right:
What I, bereft of life and death, became,
Judge by thy wit, if it has enough might.

The king of realm by the sorrowful name
From half his chest clear of the ice is bar'd;
And more I and a giant are the same,
 than giants with his arms can be compar'd:
How large must be the whole see therefore
That with so enormous parts has to be pair'd.

Had he been fair as sight him ugly bore
Now, if against his Maker rais'd his gaze
Truly of all evils he must be the core.

Oh how strongly that vision does me amaze
When I see on his shoulders three heads lie!
The one in front, vermilion red as blaze;
In the other two, which, to the first sewn by
Their napes, over each shoulder’s middle point
Are planted, two more colours sees my eye:

The right-side face yellowish white is coin’d,
The left-hand one is paint’d the nightly blend
Which to those coming from Nile valley is join’d.

Below each head two mighty wings extend,
As to so large a bird are fit: no ship
Sails thus wide ever up its mast did send.

Plumage they haven’t, nay, from root to tip
After a bat’s they take; and thrice-blown breath
Proceeds from their incessant flightless flip:

From this Cocito whole freezes to death.
With six eyes he weeps on, and down three chins
A tearful, bloody dribble harsh course hath:

Three mouths crush on in their hard-toothed grins
A soul each, as by ripples stalks are ground,
So three souls are thus tortur’d for their sins.

On th’one in front not as painfully pound
The bitings, as the claws striking his back,
Which thus a skinless flesh oft shews all round.

“That soul up there” said my lord “on the rack
Judas is, whom those teeth forever rip
With head inside, while legs kick off the crack.

Of the other two, with heads out of jaws’ grip,
Brutus hanging thou seest from the black snout:
Look how he writhes, not a word off his lip;

The third is Cassius, who in look ‘s so stout.
But night ‘s rising, and the time already has rung
To leave, for all was seen that lies about”.

As he wish’d, to his neck my arms I flung,
And he pick’d place and time best fit to ride;
And when the span of wings was most outstrung

He caught firm hold onto the hairy side:
From tuft to tuft he dropp’d then, by and by,
Between the frozen crags and shaggy hide.

When we came to the point at which the thigh
Curves, and the hip juts out the most, my dean
Upturned himself with panting strain, to lie

With his head where his feet formerly had been,
And as a man who climbs he clung to hairs,
So back to Hell our way by me was seen.

“Hold thyself well, for use we must these stairs”
Said my master with panting effort “when
“To abandon it behoves these cursed lairs.”

Through a boulder’s hole he came out of that den,
And on its rim he set me down to seat;
A wary step next to my place took then.

I raised my eyes, and saw Lucifer’s feet
Standing up in the air: then all astray
Went my belief our way back we ’d beat.

If my thoughts were then thrown in disarray,
The rough minds shall perceive, who cannot see
What point I had trespassed in my way.

“Rise now” my master said “and brace up thee:
Long is the way and awkward is the ground,
And morning hours advanc’d halfway to three.”

Not a palatial hall indeed was found
Where we had come, but only nature’s cave;
Uneven path, unlighted, down there wound.

“Ere I from this abyss myself can save,
Master mine,” said I when upright I stood,
“Some errors from my thought help me to stave:

Where lies the ice? And he of evil brood
Why looks upend’d? And what fast ride, from night
To morning, has in no time the sun withstood?”

And he to me: “Thou fancy, in thy mind’s light,
Still be on the other side of centre, where
The worm who the earth pierces wields his might.

As far as I descended, thou wast there;
When I turn’d over, the point thou trespass’d
To which all weights are led from anywhere.

And thou art under the hemisphere now cast
Which lies oppo’sd to the sky overlain
To the dry lands, under which away pass’d

He who was born and lived without stain.
On a small mound of earth thou stand upright
Which to Giudecca forms oppo’sd domain.

Here is morn, when on th’other side is night:
And he who with his fur to us was stair
Through the centre is stuck as ere our flight.
This side he fell away from Heavens fair;
And the land that before was here above,
For fear of him under the waves took lair,

And to our hemisphere thus came; and strove
So much the mount here seen to escape his mar,
Perhaps it left a void to form this cove”.

A spot is there, from Beelzebub afar
As much as that rough burrow would extend,
Where by sound, ’cause the dark to sight makes bar,

A small brook is made known down to descend,
Loosening of the stones the tight embrace
By winding currents that bland slopes there wend.

I and my leader through that hidden trace
Went along to return where the lights lie,
Not caring whether we could rest our pace.

We went up, he the first and second I,
Until my sight through a round hole could fain
Get a glimpse of fair things bright in the sky:

And hence came out to see the stars again.
Purgatory
Dear Reader,

you wonder, I am sure - supposing you are still with me, which is quite a leap of faith on my part-, why I am at it again after my former pledge [see the foreword to my version of “Inferno”] to stop at “Hell”.

I would have much liked, indeed, to have been able to begin this letter with something like the following words:

“Yielding to the kindly pressing insistence of several friends, I went back on my previous decision of limiting myself to the damage already done, i.e. to the translation of ‘Inferno’, and so took up the task of attempting also a version of ‘Purgatorio’....”

Unfortunately, such an incipit would be slightly untruthful. Indeed, several friends asked me half in joke - after browsing through my version of “Hell” - whether I thought of proceeding further; but none of them seemed particularly in need of a promise on my part to do so.

The plain truth is that a while after completion of the first part I began to feel not only a bit restless, but also quite curious to see what could well be the differences - in difficulty, in psychologic approach, in quality of results-, had I tackled this second part of Dante’s masterpiece, in comparison with the first.

So, half uncommittedly, I decided to take up this task, purely as a trial, for the first Chant of Purgatory. Unexpectedly, this was not as tough, and the result seemed not quite as bad, as I had feared. From that to be drawn into an irresistible escalation from Chant to Chant the step was a very short one... and eventually I plunged for the whole thing.

* * *

Also for this second experience - as I had done, albeit in a less systematical way, for the “Inferno” - I chose not to translate the Chants in their successive numerical order. The sequence I followed was in six successive blocks of Chants, or “stages”, composed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Chants/Chants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>Chants 1 and 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>Chant 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>Chants 9 and 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Chants 5, 13, 21 and 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5</td>
<td>Ch. 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, 27 and 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6</td>
<td>All even-number Chants from 2 to 32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Representing graphically the succession of the 33 Chants as a linear row of 33 positions (each one either active or blank in each stage), and the six stages by six such rows from top down, the above scheme can be visualized as follows:

```
*   *   *   *   *   *
*   *   *   *   *   *
*   *   *   *   *   *
*   *   *   *   *   *
*   *   *   *   *   *
*   *   *   *   *   *
```

This plan may seem quite odd, but there was a strategy behind my choice.

First of all - as I already said in the foreword to my translation of “Inferno” - I wished to hide from the reader the variations in my skills that might have occurred in the course of the translation. Since the variations were bound to be slower and slower as the translation proceeded, the groups of Chants translated consecutively in each stage could grow larger and larger (in each stage the untranslated gap
between Chants to be translated was kept uniform; the remaining “blank” gaps between already translated Chants became more than halved from stage to stage, from 31 to 15 Chants and then to 7, 3, 1). Secondly, the number of Chants to be translated in each stage was exactly one less than the sum total of those already “done” in all the preceding stages. Although this was of course only a fictive accounting which left the substance of total work ahead unchanged, it gave a psychological assurance that within the limited horizon of the next stage the immediate task awaiting me was not larger than the work already carried out. The fast-diminishing size of the untranslated gaps gave additional impetus; I felt, indeed, quite comfortable with this arrangement. [If the above smacks of numerology, I don’t much care: probably Dante, who was not himself averse to numerology, would not have spurned this particular trick!]

The pace of translation was slower than for the “Inferno”. This was due in part to what I experienced as a (on the average) greater difficulty, caused by the more abstract (sometimes even arid) character of the text; in part because I did no longer feel the sense of urgency which had pushed me on unrelentingly through the previous endeavour. It would indeed be a “good” month the one in which I was able to achieve the translation of two, or at most three Chants, as compared to an average of close to 5 Chants per month achieved for the “Inferno” [The very first months of this new endeavour (I started on it at the beginning of March, 1998) were particularly sluggish in that respect, with less than one Chant per month]. This change of pace was not unwelcome: after all, I was not in a hurry, and the previously felt urge had been at times quite oppressive, or at least stressing (I sometimes used to say, jokingly, that I felt in a haste to get out of the scalding fires of Hell).

To venture into the depths of “Purgatory” as a self-appointed translator was an even more compelling (if slightly less harrowing) experience than it had been the case for “Hell”. First of all, my previous knowledge of this second book was very slight, so most of it sounded (and was) quite new to me. Secondly, the change in tone and subject matter from the first to the second part of “Divina Commedia” makes for a very wide jump. In place of the sanguine passions and characters depicted in “Hell” with at times almost furious involvement on the part of the Author (and the possibility of identification on the part of the reader), we find now a rarefied atmosphere, with subdued personalities and a very complex (at times frustratingly so) philosophical-theological background, in the expounding of which Dante shows all his erudition. That does not mean that the poetic climate is less intense or of an inferior grade: here are to be found, according to certain critics, some of the most beautiful verses of Italian literature, witness the most famous one:

“Dolce color d’oriental zaffiro”

(1st Chant, 5th tercet) (?); verses which constitute a very difficult challenge indeed, even for much better translators than I can presume to be at my best.

[I was all the more impressed with Dante’s genius, insofar as he is able most of the times to infuse life and blood even in a subject matter which is often more devotional than dramatic. This he accomplishes now with the flashing illumination of a vivid simile, now with a lively rendition of his all too human reactions and emotions when confronted with a transcendent, mysterious dimension].

However, I have to admit that I felt less insecure, in this second endeavour, than I had felt in the first one. So I felt, for instance, no longer the impulse to use the childish device of writing the first version of each Chant in Old English Text type [see my foreword to “Hell”]: instead, I composed directly the translations in “New York” type (10 pts.; the word-processing software was Word 6.0.1 for McIntosh, the same used for “Hell”).

I felt also somewhat more adept in dodging the difficulties and in wriggling around arduous passages, no doubt most of the times at the expense of aesthetics (as well as of the literal respect of the original text). In this context I must confess that I grew so bold as to invent, a few times, a word not reported by the dictionary: for instance, I coined the adjective “feal” (“loyal”), reasoning that since the word “fealty” exists, then it would be at least plausible to admit the corresponding adjective, in the same way as “reality” presupposes the adjective “real”.

I was led to reflect again and again, as the work progressed, on the very debatable choice of retaining
the metric and rhyming scheme of the original. It became more and more clear how stringent are the constraints this decision implies, and how the risk of achieving a mechanical “flavour” always loomed very near. However, I decided to stick by this choice, in part to be consistent with my “Hell”, in part because at least in this way I had a firm formal guideline; and lastly because of a deeply ingrained, instinctive (**) reluctance to replace a fundamental choice of Dante with a new one which would inevitably contain more than an element of arbitrariness.

(*) A note on the numbering of verses (valid also for “Hell”). I went against the prevailing use of numbering the individual verses and numbered the successive tercets instead. The reason is that for me the unit, or the indivisible “quantum” of Dante is not the verse, but the tercet; besides, since my translation is not a verse-to-verse literal one, I felt it was useless, for reference purpose, to be able to pinpoint each individual line.

(**) Hence not to be explained on rational grounds.

I am aware that in English poetry assonances are often accepted in place of proper rhymes. Although on a few occasion I yielded to this device, I generally tried to avoid this as much as possible, for the already cited reasons.

My new translation is on the whole less literal than that of “Inferno”. Maybe this time I got a little less fearful, less “frozen to death” by the dread to depart even slightly from the august original patterns; maybe the strain of following strictly the phrasing of Dante was too great for me and I could not keep it up indefinitely.

This led sometimes to the curious situation where my translation is more laden with similes than the original text. See as an example the 26th tercet of the XXIIIrd Chant; where Dante says:

...cinqu’anni non son volti infino a qui...

I translate:

...five years not yet the mill of time did grind...

which, I fancy, is not a simile which Dante would not have used if need be.

What I mean to say is that I thought in some way legitimate to use in places a turn of phrase different from Dante’s if I felt that it was, in some remote way, “Dante-like”. No doubt this liberty I took carried with it a high degree of presumption—and arbitrariness of judgment—on my part. Also, in this way quotations of short pieces of the translation becomes risky, in the sense that one could wrongly attribute to Dante sentences that were not there, or were in a very different form, in the original. These considerations bring us back to the very difficult general problem of translation. Taking for granted that a one-to-one (and hence perfectly reversible*) correspondence of the two texts is not attainable, what degrees of freedom are allowable to the translator, and what are not?

I tend to think that a rational answer to this question cannot be found; for my part, if I should provide one, I would say that what is allowed to the translator in terms of “freedom” is directly proportional to the degree of aesthetic result of the translation (which, however, cannot be judged objectively), provided he/she maintains the “flavour” of the original (again a requisite for which there is no objective measure).

* * *

A note on the frequent instances in which Dante inserts Latin phrases into his verses. Most of the times he can make the Latin words rhyme with Italian words, so the Latin phrases can be as long as a verse or even longer.

* I think one could agree to a definition of the hypothetical “perfect” translation as one which, translated back by a different person of equal skill, would give the original text. In this connection let me mention a very curious experiment suggested to me by the fervid imagination of my friend Carlo “Nikko” Niccolai, whom I already mentioned in my foreword to “Hell”. He told me:

“Why don’t you try to ‘forget’ Dante’s original text and translate back your English translation into Italian?”

I was tickled by the idea, and produced as a test a “backversion” of the first Chant of Inferno. Of course, I could not satisfy the requirement to forget the original if not in a very devious sense, i.e. in trying consciously to
stay away from the original words; this automatically excluded my two versions from the above definition of “perfect” translation. However, the result was intriguing (the interested readers, if any, can ask me for a copy). Clearly the same is not possible with English; so I either put the Latin words at the beginning of a verse (if the Latin phrase was shorter than an endecasyllable) or translated also the Latin into English. This is not very satisfactory, but I couldn’t come up with anything better. The translations of Latin phrases are in italics, so the reader can identify them.

[However, on occasion other quotations (of already known Italian poetry, or of sentences in the Provençal language) are also put in italics].

* * *

Another note on the use of historical present tense. Dante uses it quite a few times, so I felt legitimized to use it even in some cases where he uses instead the past in his narration, if this suited my rhyming purposes. However, I took care to use this device as sparingly as possible, and chiefly when the emotional charge of the narration - or the immediacy of representation - would be enhanced by such an use. An example of my using the present tense while Dante uses the past is to be found in the tercets 17, 18 and 19 of the twentyseventh Chant, where Dante illustrates his walking into a wall of fire. The narration takes on a dramatic tone and I felt it was not improper to turn it into the historical present tense; it lent - I think - a distinct sense of immediacy to the description of the awesome experience.

Of course, also the converse situation sometimes occurred, i.e. I used the past tense where Dante uses the present; these cases are, however, less frequent than the ones formerly illustrated.

* * *

A few words on the doctrinal contents of Purgatory. This can grate considerably on a modern, lay mentality [together with the fact that the souls in penance are depicted accepting punishments - which quite often take on an almost sadistic overtone - with what we perceive as an almost abject proneness: one is tempted to recall some modern political process where the accused not only confessed their alleged misdemeanours, but volunteered new self-accusations]. However, one could never think of expunging those digressions and descriptions from the body of the poem; much less should they be judged lapsing into a contemporary cultural context. The same goes as regards the probable intentions of Dante, who quite certainly aimed at edification of the consciences in the framework of the Catholic doctrine, which he knew, so to speak, backwards and forwards, earning for many centuries the sobriquet of “theologus summus”.

It is certain that the frequent doctrinal digressions lend to the Purgatory a more abstract character as compared to Inferno, while the meekly repenting overtones of the souls in penance appear as spent of all passion, in sharp contrast to the violent feelings retained - dramatically frozen for all eternity - by the damned. Moreover, the doctrinal parts are very difficult to translate and quite certainly hard on the reader. I plodded through these with a sense of frustration, knowing beforehand that the result of my efforts would be even less satisfactory than usual. However, I felt that I owed it to Dante to try my best not to skip lightly over those dissertations, so my involvement in translating them was no less intense than for the more lively descriptions or dialogues.

* * *

At the end of this new effort, some questions inevitably arise, first of all the following:
- What have I achieved by this new endeavour?
- What had I in mind to achieve when I started?

I feel, honestly, that the latter is the more difficult inquiry. To say that I simply wanted to test myself against a very arduous task, “shooting at the moon”, so to speak, would be to beg the question in some way; besides, I had already tested myself in this way with “Inferno”. I think the best approach to both questions is what has been suggested, once more, by my friend Carlo “Nikko” Niccolai, who says I essentially performed an experiment in linguistics (albeit non-professionally), and that my work should be judged as such.

But again, this is an elusive answer, because an experiment should aim to prove something, or lead to some conclusion, or be a stepping stone to further elaborations. Carlo had something of the sort in mind, to be sure; e.g. a linguistic analysis of the translation, with statistics of frequencies, correspondences, quality of words used (common or uncommon usage?), etc.

But of course this presupposes that my work be read by someone a) well qualified; b) other than myself; and that the object is worthy of the effort to undertake the kind of research alluded to. Will that ever
chance to occur? I don't know; I would like it to occur, of course, and I would care very much to know the outcome of any such appraisal, if any.

Looking from another angle at the possible interpretation of my work as an experiment, one could contend that any experiment, above all if repeated as in this case, should aim—among other things—at detecting some effect by varying some controlling factor. Was this the case, intended or not, for my new work? The only variation I am conscious of—with respect to the Hell's translation—is the partial forsaking on my part of that "philological" rigour which I so strenuously strove for in the first book. This, it seems, produced—as attested both by Carlo Niccolai and by my wife Cesira—an easier flow of the verses, which became less tortuous and more readable; it remains to be debated, however, whether this was worth the sacrifice of the abovementioned rigour. Still another question I would like to pose my Reader:

-Does the magic of Dante's poetry seep through, at least in some small measure and in some spots, in my translation?

Given for granted that this question is not for me to answer, and that I fear the answer to be mostly negative, here I can only offer my impression. A few times I was not dissatisfied by the sound and rhythm of my version, especially so on the few occasions where the translation flowed effortlessly on for a number of tercets. However, this happened, alas! all too infrequently... In the main body of the translation, I am sure, the effort and the inadequacies, the forced mechanics and clumsy handling of the rhyming, tell and show very clearly. Is it at all possible, I wonder, that the text could be taken up and revised by a mother-tongue professional versed in English poetry? Maybe in this way something good could eventually come out of it...

* * *

A last question which arises quite naturally is the following:
- Shall I (should I) go on to translate Paradise as well?

As, on concluding my translation of Inferno, I felt scarcely probable that I would ever proceed farther, so now I judge the possibility highly unlikely. The increase in difficulty—and in the level of abstraction—going from Purgatory to Paradise is at least equal, but probably much greater, than the corresponding increase from Inferno to Purgatorio. Apart from that, to tackle this new task would require a huge investment of time and energy which I doubt I could afford.

However I have learned to be cautious in forecasting where my curiosity and my level of rashness could drive me. Who knows? Maybe I shall decide, one day when I rise from sleep in an optimistic mood, to have a try at it...

If and when this should happen, I would hope, dear Reader, that you will be patient and willing enough to leaf through my new work; in the meantime, let me offer to your attention, very humbly, the present fruit of one round year of wrestling with Dante. As all battle with such larger than life figures, it was by and large its own reward.

Milano, 1st of March, 1999
First Chant

Now to cleave better waves is raising sails
At last the puny vessel of my wit,
Which leaves behind such cruel sea of wails;

‘Cause now to sing that second realm is fit
Where the human soul is cleans’d of any sin
To Heaven’s kingdom to be rais’d and lit.

Death it behoves here poetry shall win,
O holy Muses, since I to ye belong;
And Calliope, rising, aught her tune spin,

Accompanying with it my humble song;
That tune of which the wretched Pies such dire
Blow felt, to despair pardon of their wrong.

From a sweet colour of eastern sapphire,
Which was contain’d in the serene outlook
Of sky, lighting the horizon with quiet fire,

New delectation my tir’d eyes there took,
As soon as I came out of the dead air
Which so sadden’d my sight and my heart shook.

The gleaming planet leading to love fair
Lent radiant smile to the eastern sky,
Leaving the escorting Pisces of light bare.

Turned to right-hand side, then marvel’d I
At the new pole, where four new stars I gaz’d,
On which but the first folks had cast their eye.

In their quiet flames the sky rejoic’d undaz’d:
O northern land, bereft of bridal cheer,
Since thy folks’ sight to those cannot be rais’d!

As I avert my gaze from such lights dear,
Turning some way toward the opposing pole,
Where the Great Bear no longer would appear,

I see near me an old man, who stands there sole,
Worthy in his aspect of devotion, such
That more, to a father, behoves not son’s role.

Long beard he wears, with some white hair, and much
Alike to his mane’s crown, from which two streams
Of hair descend in front, his breast to touch.

The light of the four holy stars so gleams
On his face, lending it resplendent look,
That the sun’s rays to have in front he seems.
“Who are ye, against the course of the blind brook
Escaping from the eternal fief of dead?”
Said he, and, saying, his deign plumage shook:

“Who light’d your steps, or by whom were ye led
To come out of the deep shadow of night
Which ever blackens that infernal bed?

Are the laws of the abyss so bent from right?
Or is in Heaven their old counsel won,
So that ye damn’d can dare visit my site?”

My leader then grabbed my arm anon,
And with his nods and his hands and his speech
Made my knees and my brow humbly bend on.

Then answer’d him: “Not wanton I beseech
This path: a woman come from Heaven prayed
In urgent succour me this man to reach.

But since thy will demands our state be said
And explained with words of truthful ring,
My own cannot deny what thou just bade.

This man not yet suffer’d of Death the sting;
But for his folly he neared the last night
So close, by a hairbreadth he eschew’d its wing.

As I told, I was sent to set him right
Onto salvation’s path; nor other way
Was there than what I chose to reach the light.

Among the wicked folks we had to stray,
And now I wish to shew him all those shades
Who cleanse themselves under thy watchful ray.

Long tale would be to tell the pits of Hades
Through which I led him; from high on is lent
Help to bring him hear thee and see thy glades.

Now deign his coming to welcome; he went
Seeking that freedom which is held so dear,
As knows who life for her wilfully rent.

Thou know it well, who shunned not the spear
Of death in Utica, where those clothes thou shed
Which in the glorious day will shine so clear.

The eternal laws we did not downtread;
This one lives, and myself Minos can’t bind;
From the same ring I came, where has been led

Thy Marcia, who with demure glance and kind
Still openly begs thee, saint man, to hold
Her thine; for love of her lend us fair mind.

To walk thy seven kingdoms make us bold:
If down there to be mention’d thou hast care,
To her my grateful words shall soon be told.”

“So much in life I liked Marcia fair”
Said he in reply “that my will gladly bent
To all wishes of which she made me aware.

As beyond the evil stream to abide she ’s meant,
By her I can’t be mov’d, after the writ
That ’s been in force since out of there I went.

If by woman high up your path is lit,
As thou said, thou need not my heart entice:
All that she asks, I shall comply with it.

Now go, and care to gird with willow nice
This man, and of all dirt to cleanse his face,
Washing away the soot which on it lies;

For untoward would be to send his pace
The first heaven-ordained ward to reach
With eyes still soil’d by hellish smoky trace.

This small island around its shallow beach,
Down there where the sea waves steadily pound,
On soft mud bears thin reeds; those thou beseech.

None other plant could grow within that bound
That sprouts fronds or whose branches hard become,
’Cause to take water’s blows unfit is found.

Not this way be thereafter your outcome;
The Sun, rising already, will then shew
Gentler ascent to mount the slope up some.”

He disappear’d; myself upright I drew
Without speaking, and sidling close beside
My leader, toward him my gaze I threw.

He began: “After me direct thy ride;
Let us turn back: this way slope down thou see
This plain; thus to the beach our path will glide”.

Over departing night was seen to be
Winning the dawn, and from afar at last
I could discern the sparkling of the sea.

We were treading the lonely plain, quite fast,
As man returning to the long-lost way,
Who feels, until he ’s there, astray he ’s cast.
When we came to the place where some dew lay
With sun embattled, but, by wind refreshed,
More than elsewhere its moisture seem'd to stay,
Both hands spread open on green grass enmeshed
Sweetly my master, collecting the dew;
And I, alert to thoughts his actions fleshed,
Offer'd to him my cheeks, with not a few
Teary ruts; there unsoil'd again he made
The hues that under hellish soot withdrew.

We reached then the shore, where not a shade
Was to be seen, in front of which no sail
With safe return cleave waters can be said.
Here he girt me to the holy man's avail:
O wonder! as he pick'd the humble reed,
From the spot whence it had been torn, the frail
Branch sprout'd again, as from fast-blooming seed.
The sun already touch'd the horizon whose
Meridian line's high summit overlies
Jerusalem, where day to dusk would lose;

And night, which on opposing path relies,
Was rising out of Ganges with the Scales
That she lets slip from hands when with day vies

Her length; so that Dawn's cheeks, there in the vales
Where I dwelt, went from white and rosy to
That orange tint which later to gold pales.

Along seashore we were still, as those who
Over their journey reflect in their mind,
Doing in heart what their bodies won't do.

And as near morning in the sky thou find
In the west, near the sea's horizon, glow
Red through thick vapours Mars, of a like kind

Appear'd to me -would that such sight I know
Again!- a light over the sea run fast,
So much, any fleet flight to it is slow.

As little time away from it I cast
The eye to ask my lord, I found it grown
In shine and size when look'd again at last.

And then at either side of it was shown
A white I don't know what, and later still
Under it other white by sight was known.

My master kept his silence yet, until
Were seen as wings the first-appeared whites;
And when he had well known the helmsman, shrill

Cried: "Bend, bend thy knees, join hands: such rites
Are due to this God's angel: thou shalt see
Henceforth many of these attending knights.

Look how the human tools and ways scorns he:
Not oars, nor sails he resorts to, but plies
With his wings, between shores so apart, the sea.

See how those limbs he strains toward the skies,
Moving the air with plumage evergreen,
Which, unlike mortal hair, moults not, nor dies."

Then, as nearer and nearer us was seen
The divine bird, brighter appear'd his look;
For which my eyes could not sustain the sheen

From so near, but shied down; and ground he took
With a vessel so slim and light, it rode
Without draught on the waves which the sea shook.
On the stern the celestial helmsman bode,
Bringing his bliss inscribed on his face;
One hundred souls, or more, inside abode.

“Escaping Israel from Aegypt’s space”:
They were singing with single voice this song,
And of that psalm ensued the further trace.

The angel made the sign of cross; along
The shore all hurl’d themselves hurriedly, and he
Went away, fast as came, with wingbeat strong.

The crowd ashore remaining seem’d to be
Wild of the place, looking around as may
Look men who appraise the newer things they see.

The sun was darting from all parts the day,
Whose fateful arrows in the middle sky
Had chased Capricorn from its high lay,

When the newcomers -each raising his eye
Toward us- asked: “If perchance you can,
Show us the way to scale that mount nearby”.

And Virgil answer’d: “Ye believe the span
Of this island we know, methinks; but we
Are pilgrims as you are, I and this man.

We arriv’d not long ago, ere from the sea
You came, by other way, so hard and rough,
That to mount yonder a child’s play will be.”

Those souls, who had perceived well enough,
From my breath, that I was alive still, went
All pale, so was on them this wonder tough.

As at an herald’s olive branch’s portent
Gather folks to hear news, and of them none
Shies away in the crowd from pressing, bent

All on looking at me were; to postpone
Going on to be made fairer thus seem’d
Those souls, forgetting their true aim to hone.

I saw one among them come forward; beam’d
He with so great affection, flinging wide
His arms to embrace me, that the same I deem’d

Fit to do. O vain shades, no substance hide
Your looks! My arms I clasp’d behind him thrice,
And as oft I came back clasping my side.

I think the wonder paint’d my face; with nice
Countenance smil’d the shade, and drew back; I
Follow’d him, as my will would me entice.

Softly he requested me to stop: and by
His voice I recognized him, and prayed
To pause and speak with me he ‘d not deny.
He replied: “As in flesh I lov’d thee, laid
Bare of it still I love thee: this is why
I stop; but for what cause thy journey ‘s made?”

“Casella mine, this long journey endure I
To come back here once more” said I; “but such
Long time how comes thou were left standing by?”

And he to me: “No wrongdoing did touch
My fate, if he who takes or leaves at rest
Many a time this bless’d passage didn’t vouch;

‘Cause from just will his own is formed best;
It ‘s true he took these last three months all those
Who wanted to come in, without contest.

Me too, whose gaze in all this waiting rose
To the sea where the Tiber salt stream gains,
Benignly at last the angel would enclose.

To that estuary now his wing he strains,
For there always will gather those who won’t
Fall toward Acheron’s benighted plains.”

And I: “If newer laws here reigning don’t
Impede memory or use of the love song
Which to appease all my whims on earth was wont,

With it be pleas’d to lull my soul along,
Which with my flesh and blood in coming here
Went to such labours, untold woes among!”

“Love whose discourse within my mind I hear”
Began he then so sweetly to recite,
That such sweet words are still resounding clear.

My master, I and all those folks were quite
Enraptur’d by that verse, in such a way
That we seem’d of all care made free and light.

Longer to him intent would fain each stay,
When, lo! the upright old man therein appear’d,
Shouting: “What’s this about, why such delay?

What sloth such laziness to ye endear’d?
Run to the mount, to be divest’d from scales
Which do not let God’s sight to ye be clear’d.”

As when, pecking at grains or rye in vales,
The doves flocking to pasture cease to coo
And quiet, no longer strutting, with low tails,

If they spot fearful thing, without ado
Leave untouched their fodder on the ground,
Because far greater cares away them shoo,

Thus saw I that green crowd disperse all round,
And go in open ranks toward the slope,
As man who goes, but new aim has not found:
Nor in departing were we slow to cope.
Third Chant

Whereas the sudden flight of those poor shades
Had dispersed them all along the plain,
Toward the mount where justice our sins grades,

To my trustworthy companion again
I turned: how could I without him go?
Who would draw me the mountaintop to attain?

He seem'd to feel from his own thoughts some woe:
O noble, purest conscience: from small fault
How bitter remorse bites within thee grow!

When his feet had drawn back hurry's assault,
Which dignity in each act tends to contain,
My mind, no longer press'd, could then vault

To wider intent, eager aught to gain,
And my gaze to the mount I gave instead
Of which for skyward reach there is no twain.

The sun, which behind us was blazing red,
Had its rays broken up in front of me,
For but around my figure they were led:

I glanced to my side in fear to be
Left all alone, seeing but in my lead
Darken'd the ground, from the sun's lighting free;

And my solace: “Why such mistrust I read?”
Began to say, turning to face my sight:
“Don't thou think be with me, who tend thy need?

The body which in life screen'd the sunlight
Is buried where it's now vespert: 'twas brought
From Brindisi to Naples' seashore bright.

If shade in front of me thou now see nought
To marvel is unfit, as if the cause
Sky to sky screens no ray thou should have sought.

To suffer torments, heats and colds dispose
Such bodies the supreme Virtues, whose ways
To achieve this is forbidden to disclose.

Fool is the man who, trusting reason's rays,
Hopes to run the endless road travelled by
Him who one substance in three persons lays.

Be content, human folks, of that, not why;
For, could you have known all, there was no need
For Mary to bear child, for Christ to die;

And you saw vainly longing for such feed
Men who could have their burning hunger quelled,
Where instead cause for mourning folks now read:
I mean Plato, Aristotle unexcelled,
And many more”; and then he dropp’d his brow,
With troubled mien, nor further words he spelled.

We came the while where the mount met the low
Ground: here so steep we found the rocky face,
That fruitlessly the legs their strength would show.

Between Lerici and Turbia the harshest space
Of craggy broken ravines looks a stair
Broad and easy, compared to this place.

“I wonder now which way becomes more fair
This slope” cutting his walk the master said,
“So that we mount without stepping on air?”

And while he kept his face to ground, and made
Up his mind, our way on up to sort,
And I gaz’d round the rock in search of aid,

On my left hand there appear’d a cohort
Of souls, who toward us were moving feet
So slow, their walk of standing still fell short.

“Raise” said I, “master mine, thine eyes; we meet
Now folks who can teach us how we should cope,
If by thyself thou can’t find counsel neat.”

He look’d up then, and forsaking his mope
Answer’d: “Let’s go to them, who come so slow;
And thou, sweet son of mine, firm up thine hope.”

The distance a strong man his stone could throw,
After we took a thousand steps, still were
Sever’d from us those folks, when they all, lo!,

Suddenly stopped, sidling up to where
The hard steep boulders rose; and stood there press’d
Together, as in doubt men stop to stare.

“O you well-ended souls already bless’d”
Began Virgil “for that unending peace
That, methinks, each of you longs to be access’d,

Tell us where milder slope around here is,
So that up on this mount we find our way:
Wiser men more dislike waste time amiss.”

As the tame sheep are wont to leave fold’s bay
First one, then two and three, and the rest, shying
From coming out, their snout and eye down lay,

And what the first ewe does, the others -lying
Against her, should she stop- will do the same,
Simpleminded, to know the why not trying:

Thus the head of that fair cohort then came
Toward us, as I saw, with demure mien,
And with gait at one time eager and tame.
As those in front perceiv’d there was no sheen
Over the ground on my right side, where shade
Thrown from me to the sheer rock wall was seen,

They stood still, nay, some small retreat they made,
And all those who behind were coming stood
As well, without the cause having been said.

“Unasked I confess, to assuage your mood,
That this you see is human body indeed;
That is why the sun’s rays it stops for good.

Don’t marvel; but believe not without seed
Of Heaven’s virtue this live man dares try
To overcome this high wall, nor without need.”

Thus my lord; from those worthy ranks the cry
Rose: “Go back, and ahead of us advance”,
To shoo us on their hands signalling by.

And one of them began: “Whoever chance
Thou to be, without stopping turn thy face:
Dost thou recall down having seen my stance?”

I fix’d my gaze on him, nor slow’d my pace:
Fair-hair’d was he, handsome and of gentle mien;
A brow was slit, though, by a sword cut’s trace.

When I had humbly disclaim’d having seen
Him ever, he exclaim’d: “Look now”; and shewed
Cleaving his chest a slashing sore and mean.

Then smiling said: “Manfredi am I, accrued
To my grandmother empress Constance; and
I beg thee, when thy earthly life ’s renewed,

That thou go to my winsome daughter’s land,
To tell her, mother of the honour’d kings
Of Aragon and Sicily, how stand

True facts. When I receiv’d two deadly stings
That wreck’d my body, in tears I remitted
Me to Him who forgives most nasty things.

Loathsome sins in my life I had committed:
But the Divine forbearance arms so wide
Opens, that all beseeching are admitted.

If the Cosenza bishop, who to ride
Was sent by Clemens after me, had read
In God’s face this forgiving kindly side,

My body’s bones would still belong where dead
I was depos’d, under a heavy shield
Of cairn, near Benevento bridge’s head.

Now to rain’s and wind’s blows those same bones yield,
Out of my kingdom, along Verde’s streams,
Where without mourning candle they were spill’d.
Despite their curse not wholly lost here seems
The eternal love, which can come back, till life
Keeps of the waning hope some verdant gleams.

’Tis true that each who should reach death in strife
With the Holy Church, even in death repenting,
It behoves to remain, with penance rife,

Out of this slope thirty times the unrelenting
Space of his scorn, unless merciful prays
Are the length of decree somewhat indenting.

See, therefore, whether to cheer my days
Thou can to my good Constance make disclos’d
How thou saw me, and in what penance stays
My soul: much pain is for her prays depos’d.”
Fourth Chant

When around delectation or offence
Which by some of our senses be conceiv’d
The soul collects itself, it ensues hence

Naught through any other sense by it ‘s receiv’d;
And this negates the error which maintains
That within us soul upon soul is weav’d.

And hence, when heard or seen thing our wit gains
That strongly turn’d to it our soul will keep,
No conscience of time passing man attains;

For passing time to one virtue does seep,
And other one the whole soul occupies;
The former ‘s loose, the latter is bound deep.

Live experience of this my soul now tries,
Hearing in wonder what that spirit said;
For though fifty degrees up in the skies

Has ascended the sun, no attention paid
I, and we are now where those souls as one
Cry to us: “Here is what you ask’d our aid

For”. Not larger a path is to be run
Than with few thorns the peasant often closes
When the grapes are made brown by autumn sun,

There where the passage the way up discloses
To my leader, whom I follow alone,
As the souls’ crowd to part from us disposes.

Up to Sanleo, to Noli down the stone
Leads; to Caccume and Bismantova mounts
Man with his feet; but here better is flown

-With the slim wings and feathers which accounts
For, I mean, the ardent wish- behind that lead
That of hope and of light provides me founts.

Up through the broken rock we kept low speed,
As from each side press’d us the stony walls,
And feet and hands to ground we had to feed.

As we came to the summit rim, where stalls
The sheer path, and the open slope appears,
“Master mine,” said then I “whereto fate calls?”

And he: “Further to mount nourish no fears,
But follow me without falling behind,
Until some wise escort within sight nears”.

The mount’s top’s height numbed the sight and mind,
And the slope was so steep, the line that joins
Mid dial to center is of flatter kind.
Then prompted me to say my tired loins:
“Sweet father mine, turn back, and see that I
Shall be alone, unless rest thy will enjoins”.

“My son,” said he “to come till here do try”,
Pointing to a ledge higher not much, the knoll
On that side is all round encircled by.

His words spurred me on so much, the toll
Of fatigue winning, I crept after him,
Until my body over the ledge would roll.

We stood awhile a-sitting there, our whim
To look over the past ascent to sate,
Turned to east from where we ’d gain’d the rim.

I looked first to the low shores: at late
Morning sun I gaz’d then, and wonder’d why
On our left side its rays were falling straight.

Well knew the poet how amaz’d was I
Because Sun’s carriage in its journey stood
Between us and the northern part of sky.

For which he said: “If in Gemini should
Find itself that high mirror which of great
Light to both hemispheres comparts the good,

Thou would see Zodiac’s ruddy part rotate
Even closer to Bear, unless it came
Out of the path it ever trod in state.

If thou how that can be presently aim
To know, within thyself conceive the image
Of Sion and this mount on earth, the same

Horizon sharing, each of them from stage
Of oppos’d hemispheres; for which the way
Which ill Phaeton ran with will not sage

Thou shalt see it behoves to appear to stay
In Sion on one side, on the other here,
If this question thy wits will clearly assay.”

“For sure, my teacher, never did I hear”
Said I “so clearly explain’d as discern I
Now, what to comprehend I was not peer,

Namely the larger circle of the sky
Most exhalted, Equator by some said,
Between winter and sun always to lie,

For the reason thou say from here is laid
Toward north, whereas Jews are wont to see
It lean toward the lands of hotter shade.

But I would like, provided it please thee,
To know how far we ’ll go; for the knoll soars
Higher than can my eyes.” And answer’d he:
“This mount is such, that at its lower doors
Always it’s grievous to begin the ascent;
And the higher man goes, the less its course
Hurts. Hence, as soon as will the slope relent,
So that thy going almost as light will be
As to ship that downstream gliding is sent,
Then the end of this journey thou shalt see:
Wait until then and there to rest from toil.
More I can’t say, telling the truth, to thee.”

And as these words were spoken, from the soil
Nearby a voice was heard saying: “Perchance
In need of rest earlier will thee embroil
This path!” The sound made us turn, both, askance;
And on our left we saw a boulder loom,
On which neither of us had cast a glance.

There our steps we drew; and in the room
Behind the boulder, in the shadow, shades
Sat, as men who for sloth sit down in gloom.

And one of them more tired in those glades
Was sitting, clasping with both arms his shins,
Low his face between them, bent shoulder blades.

“Sweet lord,” said I “catch sight of him, whom wins
Laziness so, he shows greater neglect
Than if were his true sisters slothful sins.”

Turning, he minded us, and no respect
Showing, shot us a glance but up his thigh,
Saying: “To mount the slope thou’ll sure delect,
Valiant man!” I knew him; the short breath by
Which I was anguish’d still, did not prevent
Me from going to him, and when well nigh
I was, his lower’d head he hardly unbent,
Asking me: “That the sun on thy left side
Leads its cart did thou well, at last, consent?”

His lazy stance and the short words no pride
Arous’d, but made my lips show a light smile;
Then began I: “Belacqua, I cannot hide
I pity thee no longer; but awhile
Tell why herein thou sit: dost thou await
Escort, or the used ways again thee wile?”

“Brother, no avail I’d gain from upward gait”
Said he “cause would not let me atone my sin
God’s angel sitting ward at yonder gate:

It behoves out of it around me spin
The heavens, long as in my life they spun,
For me until late the good sighs did not win;
Unless help me, before then, prays that run
Upward from hearts known in God's grace to be:
Other prays the celestial ears don't stun.”

But Virgil mount'd already in front of me,
Saying: “Come on at last: look up, see how
The sun touches the meridian, and on sea
Morocco is clad by night's black feet by now”.
Fifth Chant

Hardly had I depart’d from that shade,
Moving my steps after my master’s lead,
When behind, pointing, one of them loud said:

“Look! On the lower one the sun’s rays need,
Coming from right, stop short, failing to reach
His left side; and alive he seems indeed!”

I turned at this sound, and saw then each
Of those shades beholding in rapt gaze
But me and light’s broken path, bereft of speech.

“Why does thy wit entangle in such maze,”
My master said, “till thou slow down thy pace?
What they whisper should least thy conscience daze!

Stay behind me, not caring what man says;
Stand firm, as a stout tower never shakes
Its top, though winds may blow across its face;

‘Cause ever man in whom thought overtakes
Previous thought, farther strays from his own aim,
For that of this enfeebles strength and stakes.”

What could I say, if not ‘I come’, with lame
Mien, overcast somewhat of that red hue
For which sometimes man gets respite from blame?

Across our path the while advanc’d not few
Folks, traversing the slope, whose voices, singing
“Miserere”, nearer and louder grew.

When they perceiv’d my body stopp’d the impinging
Sun’s rays from passing through, they changed their song
To an “Ob!” which long and hoarse seem’d to be ringing;

And two of them, as heralds, ran along
To meet us and to ask: “Pray, make us wise
To your state, if you atone not for some wrong.”

And my master: “To those who here to apprise
Such news sent you, go back and tell that true
Flesh is the body of this, and not disguise.

If to gaze on his person they did slew
Their going, as I think, enough is said:
Profit can gain those who him honour shew.”

Never saw I so fast by lightning’s blade
Be rent clear sky at night, nor at sunset
The stormy clouds which August’s blazing made,
As fast went up those two souls, faster yet;  
And, once rejoind, more folks with them came back  
As a host unrestrained in pursue 's let.

“There comes pressing on us quite a large pack,  
And they 'll pray thee for aught” the poet said:  
“Walk on then, but in listening don't lack.”

“O soul who with that body in which wert laid  
Go through this land to gain true bliss”they cried,  
“Somewhat slow down thy walk to yonder glade.

Look if any thou saw before we died  
Of us, that thou bring back of them new fame:  
Pray, don't walk on! Is any stay denied?

Forceful death we were dealt, and all a same  
Fate of obdurate sinners to the last  
Had shared: but from Heaven a ray came

To enlighten us; so we, regretting past  
Sins and forgiving,died at peace with Him  
By want of sight of Whom we 're overcast.”

“Look as I may, though your fame be not dim,  
No one I recognize; but if for aught  
I can accomplish you nourish keen whim,

All you ask, for that peace which long I sought  
From world to world after the leading strides  
Of such a mentor, by me shall be wrought”.

A soul began then: “Each of us confides,  
Without more solemn oath, thou shalt comply  
With this pledge, if such will thy Fate abides.

So first among these souls now dare speak I,  
Asking that, when thou 'll see my native land,  
Between Romagna and Charles' reign, thou try

To make my folks in Fano, on thy demand,  
With proper rites to adore, to atone for mine  
Grievous sins, which caus'd me herein to stand.

There I was born; but the wounds I repine,  
Whence my blood poured out, and life with it,  
Were made by sons of Anthenore's old line,

Those most trustworthy I deemed in my wit;  
Azzo of Este for it sent, from deep hate  
Of me, greater than reason would see fit.

But, had on Mira's way been turn'd my gait,  
When caught up at Oriaco in a short time,
Still with the breathers’ lot would be my fate.

I ran into the swamp, where reeds and slime
So entangled me, I fell; and I saw there
Draining to a pool of blood all my life’s prime”.

Then said another soul: “Would, by this stair
The mount ascending, thy desire come true;
With piety lend ear to my despair!

Bonconte I am, from Montefeltro I drew;
Neither Joan, nor others care to pray
For me, so my mates’ gaze I have to eschew.”

And I: “What force or fate led thee astray
Near Campaldino so, that on earth none
Of thy grave ever could the true place say?”

“Alas!” said he, “a stream runs down alone,
At Casentino’s foot, from side to side,
Born over Ermo in Appennines’ high throne;

Where its name becomes lost in larger tide,
I came, while my wounds’ blood soaked the plain,
On foot, seeking from enemies to hide.

Here sight and word became extinct and vain;
Invoking Mary’s name I died, and here
Fell I, and but my flesh on earth had lain.

Among the living bring this truth thou hear:
God’s angel took my soul, and Hell’s envoy
Cried: ‘Why take my prey? For a small tear,

O Heaven’s one, to my utmost annoy
Of this sinner thou steal the eternal part!
But of the rest I ’ll make different ploy!’

Thou knowst how in the air to thicken start
The moist vapours which later become rain,
Rising to the high skies that cold impart;

Here came the evil will e’er bent to attain
Evil deeds with his wit, and wind and cloud
He mov’d by virtues in his nature lain.

Then, as the day had wan’d, he went, as vow’d,
From Pratomagno to the high chain to clad
With mist the valley, and the sky to shroud,

So that to rain the pregnant air then had
To convert; what of it the ground could not
Receive, to brook and rill was quickly led;
And as soon join'd to major torrents, shot
Toward the royal stream with run so fast
That nothing could oppose its rabid trot.

The Archiano bloat'd by flood my body at last
Found frozen on its mouth; and, from my breast
Untying the arms I cross'd when overcast

With pain, threw me into Arno, which compress'd
My corpse against its bottom and its banks;
Then with its carried silt me fully oppress'd.”

“Oh, when of thy return thou shalt say thanks,
From long road taking rest on native land”,
Made sequel a third soul from those sad ranks,

“Be mindful of this Pia, bound here to stand:
Siena made me, unmade Maremma, where
Lives the man who knows all: he ring'd my hand,

To make his bride of me, with his gem fair.”
Sixth Chant

When the dice gamblers' company will part,
He who lost with his sorrow's left behind,
Recalling bets, and sadly learns the art:

With the winner away all folks will wind,
Some up in front, some at his back to tail,
And some at sides, trying to catch his mind;

Of this and that, pausing not, hears he tale;
Those to whom he hands out, to him don't stick;
And thus from pressing crowds he finds avail.

Such was I in that throng there teeming thick,
Turning to them, hither and thither, mine
Face, and with pledges coming away quick.

Here the drown'd in a fast chase Aretine
Was, and the one who suffered death at
Ghino di Tacco's hands in his craft's line.

Praying with extended hands, I saw, there sat
Federigo Novello; from Pisa hail'd
He who made good Marzucco lay pride flat.

Earl Orso I saw; and the soul therein trail'd
Sever'd from body for envy and for hate,
As he repeat'd, not because in faith fail'd:

Pierre de la Brosse I say; on this should wait
The Brabant woman, while alive, to make
That for it she should not suffer worse fate.

As my freedom at last able to take
Was I from all those shades, who prayed me
To get prays to free them from their just stake,

Hastening their becoming saint, "I see"
Began I "in thy book denied, my light,
That by prays can be bent Heaven's decree:

And these folks only of this prayed me tight:
Would perchance be made vain their hope, or say,
Of thy text have the sense misread I might?"

And he: "My writing plainly read thou may;
And their hope is not doomed either, should
Thou follow of thy reason the sound way;

For the celestial judgment never could
Bend because loving fire shall at once fill
The penance those here stuck must bear for good;

And when the verse thou mention wrote my quill,
No debt could be condoned for man's pray,
'Cause the pray was address'd to false God's sill.
Truly thou should not stop along thy way
In so subtle a doubt: will solve the knot
Who between truth and reason shall shed ray:

Beatrice I mean, if intend thou canst not;
Thou 'll see her yonder up, reaching the crest
Of this mount, happy and laughing on that spot.”

And I: “My lord, I urge we go more press’d,
For no longer am I so tired, and
In the knoll’s shade, thou see, we have ingress’d”.

“On present day we ’ll cover of this land
The most” he answer’d “that to us remains;
From thy thought otherwise the things, though, stand.

Ere thou get on the top, thou ’ll see the plains
Lighted again by him, that now is hid
So path uncut by thee his shining gains.

But from the quest for quicker way shall rid
Us, methinks, that soul yonder, see, who alone
Sits, toward us raising his eyelid.”

We came to him: o lombard soul, as stone
Pois’d, aloft and disdainful in thy pride,
And in slow-moving eyes how grave in tone!

He keeps his earnest silence, while we ride
Toward his place, as lion in rest
Letting but gaze, nailed on us, to glide.

Virgil alone, come next to him, express’d
Our wish to find the best ascent; but he,
Instead of giving answer to the quest,

Of our country and land wanted to be
Informed; and my sweet leader began
“Mantua...” to which the shade, intent to see

And hear, rose from his seat and at once ran
To Virgil, saying: “I ’m Sordello, born
Of thy land!”; and each hugg’d the other man.

Serf Italy! Resort of pain and scorn,
Vessel wanting a helmsman in fierce gale,
Turn’d brothel vile, of all thy domains shorn!

That kindly soul was ready so to hail,
If only for the sweet sound of his land,
His countryman, met on so strange a trail;

While inside thee without war do not stand
Thy men alive, and each other will gnaw
Of those that a same wall and one moat band.

Search, wretched land, if on thy shores thou saw,
Or else in thy dry inland, any part
That enjoys of sweet peace the blessed law.
To what avail Justinian us'd his art
In bridling thee, if no one 's in the seat?
Without it, less would thou feel thy shame's dart.

Shame to you, who should walk on devout feet,
And let Caesar to ride on saddle firm,
If at all God's intentions would you meet.

Look how this beast was made wild and infirm,
Since you put hand to reins, for without spurs
She was given free will to prance and squirm.

O German Albert who abandon to curs
Her who became wild and unbroken, while
Thou should mount her on saddle or on furs,

Would that just judgment fall over thy vile
Brood, and that it be novel and wide-seen,
So that just fear should thy successor rile!

'Cause thy father and thou willing have been,
For craving of your land's power, to afford
That the fair garden of Empire went lean.

Come now to see Montecchi, careless lord,
And Cappelletti, see Montaldi and foes:
Wretch'd this or that, all in utmost discord!

Come, cruel man, come and see the great woes
Of the noblemen thine, and cure their ills;
And thou shalt feel poor Santafiore's throes!

Come to see thy Rome too, who upon her hills
Her widowhood is weeping, day and night
Calling: “My Caesar, why left thou my sills?”

Come to see how our folks bask in love's light!
And if no pity of us can move thy heart,
Come to be ashamed of thy fame and thy might.

And if I may, just Jove, ask for a start
To thee who mount'd the cross for us, thy eyes
Are perchance from our land now kept apart?

Or are, these, preparations whose aim lies
In the abyss of thy counsel, for some good
That has with our intent no common ties?

'Cause in Italy's cities teems the brood
Of tyrants, and each peasant siding for
His faction as a new Marcellus stood.

And thou, o Florence mine, can set great store
On this digression touching not thy gate,
Thanks to thy folks of many a pliant lore!

Many in their hearts nourish justice, which late
Is brought to bear for reaching counsel sure;
On thy citizens' mouth, though, stays as bait.
Many refuse the public charges’ lure;
But without call thy citizens’ prompt care
Answers with crying: “I will this endure!”

Now rejoice, for all this gives thee cause fair:
The facts don’t hide whether the truth I air.

Athens and Sparta, which did never cease
To make laws and such civil mores to bear,
Made, methinks, a small step toward the lease

On good life, compar’d with thee, who dare
Be so subtle in laws, that in November
Those in October spun go out of wear.

How many times, in ages we all remember,
Money, laws, mores and offices hast thou
Changed, renewing each thy fabric’s member?

And, if thou well recall to mind, see how
Thou resemble a woman taken ill,
Who in bed can’t find repose, but then and now

Turns and tosses about, her pains to still.
Seventh Chant

After the warm welcomes three times and four
Were earnestly repeat’d, Sordello drew
Himself back, and “Who are you?” asked more.

Ere to this holy mount were turn’d the few
Souls worthy to come later to God’s side,
My burial by Octavian’s will was due.

Virgil am I; to Heaven I can’t ride
For the lone sin that the true faith I lack’d”:
Thus my leader his former self laid wide.

As is the man who in front of him has track’d
Suddenly thing for which marvel must show,
And by doubt: “It can be....no, it can’” is rack’d,

So seem’d that soul; and then lower’d his brow,
And humbly toward Virgil coming, he
Hugg’d him with subdued bearing, bending low.

“O glory of Latin folks” said then “through thee
Our language shew’d how much was worth its might;
Thou for my land eternal prize shalt be!

By what merit or grace earn’d I thy sight?
If I deserve to hear thy words, pray tell
Whether from Hades thou come, and from what site.”

“Through all the sorry circles of low Hell”
Answer’d he “to this place I came at last;
Start and journey by Heaven’s will befell.

Not for ill deeds, but for not doing, outcast
Was I from the high Sun which thou desire,
And which I knew but when my time was past.

A place down there exists, where no pains dire
Are meted, but mere darkness, and where wails
More like sighs seem to sound than screams of ire.

There is my lair, with the small kids whom fails
Redemption from first guilt, because Death’s bite
Caught them before the cleansing that all bails;

There dwell I with all those whom did benight
No human vice, and who in all virtues grew,
But of the three saint ones saw not the light.

Now, if thou know and can, give us a few
Hints so we can sooner the threshold find
Where we can enter Purgatory true.”

Answer’d he: “Fixed place is not assign’d
To us; I am allow’d to roam around
And up: far as I can, I ’ll suit thy mind;
But see how to set down the sun is bound:
Since to mount up at night we are not let,
It's fit we look, to stop, for a fair ground.

Of souls here on the right secluded set
Is: if thou like, I'll lead thee to their place,
And not without sweet taste they shall be met.”

“How can this be?” went the reply. “Man's pace
To the mount would be impeded, up once set,
By others, or of strength would lack the grace?”

To which worthy Sordello a finger let
Across the dust, saying: “This very line,
See, thou could never cross after sunset:

Not that anything more would bar the incline
Than the nocturnal darkness: but all will
To mount shall wane as the sun's rays decline.

Well could however man, leaving the hill
Behind, descend and stroll around the beach,
While the day lies below the horizon's sill.”

Then my lord, in amazement at this speech,
“Lead us then, now,” said “where thy words declare
We can rest while those souls aught will us teach.”

Small space had we progress'd beyond, when there
I saw the mount be gouged in its side;
Thus gorges earthly mounts are seen to pare.

“I'll lead you” said that shade “by not long ride
Where the slope in womb's guise is hollow'd in;
And there, waiting new light, we all shall hide.”

With mild ascent a winding path within
The cavity led us, up to the site
Where tapered the sides less than half thin.

Gold and silver fine hues, with red and white,
Indigo, pale polished wood's bright sheen,
Of freshly broken emerald green light,

All and each by the grass and flowers seen
Within that vale would easily be won,
As better things always surpass the mean.

Nature not only had painted there: anon
A thousand fragrances sweet, confused all
Into an unknown vague perfume, wafted on.

From there saw I the shades, a-sitting, call
“Salve, Regina” in choral song, unseen
Out of the gorge, deep sunk as in a stall.

“Ere disappears the sun's weakened sheen”
Began the Mantuan soul who us there led,
“Among them to be guided be not keen.
Of them all acts and faces better fed
Shall be from this high spot than down there low,
From amongst their thick ranks, they would be instead.

He who takes higher seat and seems to show
Regret to have neglected what was due,
And muted stands amid the singing row,

Rudolph emperor was, who well could sew
The gashes which bled Italy to death,
From which too late others shall her rescue.

That shade who comforts him, when had life’s breath,
Was king of lands where brings with water’s flow
Elbe to sea what Moldova in Elbe brought hath:

Octocarus was nam’d, and he would show
More worth, still infant, than his bearded son
Wenceslaus, fed by sloth and by lust low.

And that Nosey who counsel tight keeps on
With neighbour so benign in his outlook,
Died, disgracing the lily, rout’d and won:

In pain he beats his breast with both fists, look!
His companion has made, see, of his hand
Bed to the cheek, which with his deep sighs shook.

In flesh one, one in law, fathers both stand
Of France’s scourge; they know the soil’d spoilt life
He leads: hence grief on them takes such command.

That shade who for thick limbs looks fit to strife,
And side by side with the big-nosed sings,
In valour and all man’s virtues was rife;

And, after him had taken royal wings
The youth who behind him is seen to sit,
In worthy vessel would have flow’d those things,

Whilst the remaining heirs can’t be said fit:
William’s and Frederick’s though the crowns be,
To neither the best legacy was writ.

Not oft man’s virtue seeps up on the tree
To son from father: and God rules this way,
For to be sought from Him such grace wants He.

These words of mine to the big-nosed may
Apply, besides to Peter with him singing:
His son to Apulia and Provence gives bad day;

As lower than the plant’s the seed thence springing
As for dead husband’s mourning Constance more
Than are their hands Beatrice and Margret wringing.

See over there the king of simple lore
Sitting alone, England’s Henry I say;
He finds better outcome in heirs he bore.
And he who amongst those souls takes lower stay,
Looking up, Marquess William is, who gave
Piedmont both sides of Po the mournful day,

Since for him Alexandria's rebels rave.”
Eighth Chant

The hour had come at last when longing bends
Seafarers’ soul, and melts with ache their heart
On the day they bade farewell to sweet friends;

The hour which pricks with love the pilgrims’ start,
Should they hear from afar a tolling bell
Seeming to weep at dying day’s depart;

When I began to mute my hearing, well
Intent to look at one of those, who stood
And ask’d with stretched hands to hear his spell.

Having joined and rais’d both palms, he would
Fix his eyes to the east, as if to say:
“God, I don’t care for any other good”.

“Te lucis ante” in such a fervent way
Came from his mouth and with so sweet a sound,
That out of my own mind sent me his pray;

And all the others sweetly sang all round
Following him for the whole song, with eyes
Rais’d to supernal spheres in heavens found.

Sharpen, my reader, here thy sight: for lies
The truth behind so thin a veil, with ease
Can man pierce through, if he but lightly tries.

I saw that kindly host from singing cease
Thereafter, and appoint their gaze on high
Waiting; pallid and humble were all these.

Now I behold come down out of deep sky
Two angels with two swords aflame; no sting
They wield, because both blunted their points lie.

Green as leaflets just born their tunics cling
Behind them, mov’d by wind of feathers green
Of which is made the plumage of each wing.

Above us to take place, not far, is seen
One of them; on the opposing side takes ground
The other, all the folks caught in between.

Blond hair well distinct in them both is found;
But my eye goes astray gazing their face,
As sense which overwhelming rays confound.

Sordello said: “From Mary’s lair their pace
Comes; they stand guard to make the valley sure
Against the snake that soon shall show its trace.”

I knew not whence would creep the evil lure;
So, looking round, I drew closer, all cold,
This danger near my trusty lord to endure.
And Sordello: “Let’s come down near the old
Great shades, so we shall speak to them: I dare
Say, with joy they’ll welcome you in their fold”.

Barely three steps had I come down and, there
Arriv’d, I saw a shade looking at me
As though to recognize me was his care.

Dusk was already falling; hard to see
As it was for the dark, ‘twas enough clear
To unveil what earlier hid by space could be.

He to meet me, I to meet him drew near:
How was I happy, kind Judge Nino, when
I saw thee safe from hellish torments’ fear!

No merry greetings among us were then
Spar’d; and he asked: “When hast thou been sent,
Through far-flung waves, to the foot of this den?”

“Oh!” said I “through the dismal lands I went
Until this morn, and in first life am still,
Albeit, thus going, to buy the next I’m bent.”

And my words, as soon heard, appear’d to fill
Him and Sordello with wonder and stun,
For they drew back, as scared people will.

The last to Virgil, the former to one
There sitting turn’d, shouting: “Corrado, rise!
Come, and see how much far God’s will may run”.

Then turn’d to me: “For the thanks which, as wise
Man, thou owe to the Power that conceals
His motives so, no one can them apprize,

When thou’ll have pass’d the wide water that seals
Our island, tell Giovanna mine to call
To where are answer’d the innocents’ appeals.

I don’t believe her mother’s still in thrall
Of love for me, since she divest’d the white
Bands which on her wretch’d head must again fall.

From her, knowledge is gain’d with effort light
How short a time in females lasts love’s fire,
If sight or touch oft set it not alight.

Not so splendid will make her tomb’s attire
The viper in Milano’s crest, as could
Have given her the cock of Pisa’s sire.”

Thus was he speaking, in his earnest brood
Shewing the mark of that most righteous zeal
That burns with measure in the hearts of the good.

My eyes point’d to the sky with avid feel,
Intent to where the stars make slower turns,
As wheel’s spokes at the hub slow path will reel.
Virgil asked: “My son, what up there churns?”
“I look” said I “at those three torches bright
From which the nether pole all over burns”.

And he to me: “The fourfold splendid light
Thou saw this morn, on the other side went low,
And these went up where those had caught thy sight”.

As he was speaking, Sordello would tow
Him nearer, saying: “See down there our foe”;
And with his finger point’d, the place to show.

On the side without shelter, at the toe
Of the small valley, a snake was seen to hide,
The same, perchance, who fed to Eve our woe.

The evil strip through blooms and grass would glide,
The head hither and thither darting, and
Licking its back as beast smoothing its side.

I saw not -so I can’t say- how left their stand
The two celestial tercels; well was seen
One and the other swooping low on land.

Hearing the air be slit by the wings green,
The snake slither’d away; the angels then
Flew back to where they formerly had been.

The shade who had come near my Judge Nino, when
He call’d, during the whole skirmish did not
Ever let me stray away from his ken.

“Would that the lamp leading thee up burn hot
With as much thy will’s wax as there is need
To mount till highest shine at last is got;”

Began he then “if truthful news can feed
Thou from the Val di Magra or neighbour land,
Pray, tell me, hailing from eminent seed
Thereof, Corrado Malaspina’s; and
Know from the old who bore that name came I;
For loving much my stock herein I stand.”

“Oh” I said “never was I brought, in my
Travels, there; but nowhere is living man
In Europe who keeps not your name most high!

The fame your house is honour’d by well can
Sound high the lords and sound as high the land,
So that them knows even who never ran
To your doors; and I swear -would Fate command
My going up- that your well-honour’d race
For sword’s and purse’s deeds keeps not low stand.

Nature and mores so much adorn its face,
That, though the world turns awry for ill will,
Alone goes straight, scorning all wrongful trace.”
And he: “Go now; the sun shall not fulfill
Seven times the yearly cycle, coming back
To the bed Aries’ feet cover and fill,

Before thy kindly opinion finds new track
To be nail’d in thy inner thoughts, with nails
Mightier than common talk, if shall not lack

Fulfilment of God’s writ, which never fails”.
Ninth Chant

Ancient Tithonus' lover was already,
On the Eastern balcony, taking on white hue,
Out of the arms of her sweet love and steady;

Gems adorn'd her forehead with splendour true,
In shape of the cold animal whose tail
Strikes all around when to move on it's due;

The night, for her ascending set out sail,
Had taken two full steps where we now dwelt,
And of the third all but a sliver frail;

When I, who of Adam's burden some weight felt,
By slumber taken, on the grass lay stretched
At the spot where the five of us had knelt.

In the hour when begins the swallow wretched
Her bemoaning, at morning's first light's break,
For misfortune of old on her soul etched,

When man's mind from flesh ties near free can wreak,
And, less from the day's cares oppress'd, in dream
Almost divine becomes for life lusts' lack,

Sleeping I seem'd to see an eagle scream,
High in the sky suspended on gold wings,
With stretched talons diving straight as beam:

As on the Phrygian Ida seem'd these things
To occur, where Ganymede his peers had left,
When he was taken to the Gods' high rings.

Within myself I thought: "Perchance her theft,
As of use, she performs here, and elsewhere
She disdains to take us with her claws deft".

Then, her first course aught alter'd in mid-air,
She seem'd to plunge to earth, as lightning dire,
And me to the fire's sphere with her to bear.

There she and I were as on burning pyre,
And it behov'd the dream to burst, so strong
Was the heat of the imagin'd searing fire.

Not otherwise Achilles woke, among
Alien surroundings moving on his sight,
Where his senses appear'd not to belong,

When far from Chiron to Schiros, in flight
From Greek chieftains, his mother brought in sleep
The hero in her own arms, in vain respite;
Thus was I startled, when out of the deep
Slumber awoke, and bloodless went my face,
As of man upon whom coldest fears creep.

To comfort me I had but Virgil's brace,
And the sun had been up two hours or more,
And to the sea my sight had tur'd its trace.

"Don't be afraid," said my lord "but to thy core
Be assured, since we cover'd plenty of ground;
Don't cringe, nay, all good spirits bring afore.

Thou hast at last the Purgatory found:
Look yonder at the cliff by which it's girt,
Running unbroken, but at door, around.

Not long ago -dawn had begun to assert
The advent of day- while down there, on the green
By flowers strewn, thy soul was not alert,

A woman came; 'I'm Lucy,' said; 'he's been
Given in charge to me; I'll take up there
Him sleeping, that his path easier be seen.'

Sordello and the other kind spirits then were
Left behind; she took thee, and with full light
Went up, and after her go did I dare.

She put thee down just here, not ere her sight
Lovely had shewn to me that open door;
Then at one time she and thy sleep took flight."

As man who shakes away his doubts, no more
Fearful, changing from dread to glad relief,
After the truth is brought clear to the fore,

Thus was I chang'd; and as devoid of grief
My leader had seen me, he mov'd his pace,
And after him I near'd that holy fief.

Thou can perceive, my reader, as I face
A loftier subject; no wonder I need
More artful craft to render it with grace.

We came nearer, and I took clearer heed
That what look'd from afar more like a breach,
As looks a crack which cleaves a wall, indeed

Was a door, with three grades below to reach
Its sill, of three different colours, and
A doorman who as yet utter'd no speech.

As the scene more and more came close at hand,
I saw this warden sitting on last grade,
With such resplendent aspect in his stand,

That I was dazzled; and a naked blade
He wielded, which reflected light so much,
To avert my face, strive as I might, it made.

“Tell now, you there: what errand leads you on such Path?” he began: “escortless did you ascend?
Be careful lest my sword gives you ill touch.”

“Heavenly wench, well in the know, did send
Us here short time ago” my master stress’d;
“She said: ‘Go to the door as goes a friend’.

“And may further your steps who you so address’d;”
Began again the corteous doorman; “here
Advance, to these three grades safely access’d.”

There we went: and the first of grades was sheer
White marble, of such polish’d sheen, that I
Mirror’d in it lifelike, all whole and clear.

The second step was darker much, and by
Cracks run across in width and length, and rough,
From a deep-seared stone hewn there to lie.

The third one still above sits huge and tough:
Of flaming porphyry it appeared made,
To blood spilled from veins alike enough.

On it both soles held he who God’s will bade,
Sitting on the upper sill; and this, in guise
Of diamond bright, thus crown’d the highest grade.

Me up such stairs, eager enough, my wise
Leader took, saying: “Now this ward to untie
The lock, with humble words, ask in thy rise.”

Devotely at his feet myself flung I,
Asking from him to be let in the grace,
But first thrice hit my breast in silent cry.

Seven P’s on my forehead he did trace
With the point of his sword, and bade me clean
Those wounds, once let inside, off from my face.

Ashen, or coloured as dry earth, were seen
To be all of his clothes; and out from those
He drew two keys, that hidden first had been.

Golden and silver were the keys to unclose
The barred door: the white and yellow bit
He turned in the lock, while my hope rose.
“Whenever one of these appears unfit
To turn straight in the hole”, said he the while,
“This door stays shut: no one can enter it.

Dearest is one, but far greater ’s the wile
And care requir’d to make the other spin,
Which alone can untangle knots most vile.

Peter gave it to me; ’Thou shalt let in
One too many rather than one too few,
Provided’ said ‘their pride, bowing, they win’.

Then push’d the leaf of the holy door, and grew
Graver, warning: “Go in; but learn that out
Is sent whoever back his gaze here threw”.

And when were turn’d, the massive hinges stout
Of the most sacred postern, that are wrought
Of strong resonant mettle, sent without

A roaring sound, such that no equal brought
Forth the Tarpeia cliff, when was left bare
And, good Metellus won, her wealth went nought.

To the first sound I listened with care,
And “Te Deum laudamus” thought be hearing,
Sung by voices mix’d up with a sweet air.

The effect I felt can be describ’d as nearing
What is quite often heard, when singing by
With organ music: of that sound endearing

Now the words I intend, now cannot I.
Tenth Chant

AFTER WE WERE INSIDE THE BIG DOOR’S SILL
Seldom used for souls’ mistaken greed,
For which crook’d paths look straight to human will,
Resoundingly ’twas heard being shut; if heed
Had I paid turning back at it my eyes,
What right excuse for my fault would I need?

Through a cloven rock our present ascent lies,
Which strays hither and thither in its lay,
As does the wave which boat’s flanks wets and dries.

“Here it behoves we use cunning” would say
My leader then “to coast the surface, near
This side and that, close to each hollow bay.”

And this caused our steps scanty to appear,
So that the waning moon’s crescent would pry
Its bed, to clear the horizon setting, ere

We found ourselves out of that needle’s eye:
But as we went free at last in the open space
Where the mount’s slopes into a flat ring make ply,

Tired I, and we both unsure which trace
To follow, took some rest over a plain
Lonely more than are roads on desert’s face.

From its rim where with void borders the lane
To the foot of high walls that upward mount
Three human bodies could the width contain;

And as far as my sight could carry, account
Taking on left hand side as on the right,
This ledge appeared the same on ev’ry count.

Our steps were not yet mov’d on that high site,
When I perceiv’d the wall all round, which less
To be called a mounting had the right,

Was all of candid marble, on which dress
Of carvings stood such as not Polyclete,
But nature such perfection can’t express.

The angel who came down to announce the feat
Of the peace for so long longed, which threw
Open the skies after the long unseat,

In front of us looked so alive and true
Carved there in the sweetest act, that he
Did not seem silent, as to images it is due.

Thou could have sworn “Ave” he to say; for she
Was there portrayed who for all mankind
The highest love to unlock had turn’d the key;
And in her act impressed thou could find
Words: “Ecce ancilla Dei”, as clear to read
As a figure in wax sculptor can bind.

“Don’t let a single spot keep bound thy heed,”
Said the sweet master, who had me on the side
Where man’s body has the heart “but farther feed.”

To him I turn’d my face, and some more wide
Aim taking beyond Mary, after the advice
Of him who exhorted me, took a short ride

Past him, and saw another story entice
Me, sculpted in the rock; for which I near’d,
So that my eyes could see it whole and nice.

There in the marble white was carv’d the fear’d
Unrequested support, with ox and cart
On which the holy ark unsafely steer’d.

In front some folks appear’d; and all would part
In seven choirs; two senses in me vied,
Saying “They don’t sing” and “Yes, they do”, such art

Was there; and in like way each other tried
To win, with “yes” and “no” battling, my sight
And smell at the incense smoke there carv’d aside.

There the psalmist preceded, dancing light
With raised tunic, the bless’d ark; and he
Less and more than a king was thus by right.

In front of him Michol appear’d to be
At a big mansion’s window, and with mien
Spiteful and sorry to look down seem’d she.

I mov’d away from the story just seen,
To look from nearer at another one,
Which beyond Michol shew’d its milky sheen.

Here in carving the high glory was spun
Of the Roman chieftain, whose valour spurr’d
Gregory in battle against Hell to run;

Trajan I mean, the emperor, who incur’d
A wretched widow’s plaints; taking his reins,
In tears and pain at his leave she demurr’d.

The relief around him milling knights feigns
Pressing on, and the gold eagles to wave
Above them in the wind atop their canes.

The widow wretch’d seem’d among them to have
Said: “My lord, a just vengeance, prithee, make
Of my son’s killing: for this pain I rave”.

And he to answer her: “Patience aught take
Until I shall come back”. And she: “My lord,”
\[-As person in whom pains great hurry awake-\]
“and if thou don’t?” And he: “This shall afford
He who comes after me”. She then: “The good
By man wrought, if thy own ‘s not on record,
What shall thee avail?” At last he says: “Thou could
Be comfort’d: it behoves my duty I do
Ere I leave: pity and justice thus bid would”.

He who never has seen novel ado
Wrought this speaking-in-look, novel to man
Because on earth not found, and unheard too.

While to my cares I gave delectful ban
In looking at so many a humble feat
That for their Maker more endearing ran,
“I see coming this side, but with slow feet”
Was whispering the poet “a large throng:
Those shall send us up on the proper street.”

My eyes, which ever ready were to long
For the sight of new things to sate their thirst,
Were not slow to turn back and stare along
Past Virgil. I don’t want, though, reader, first
That thou be torn away from good intent
Hearing how God is paid for man’s debt erst.

Don’t mind the kind of torments thou ‘ll be sent
To bear: think of what follows, and that pains,
At worst, after Last Judgment shall be spent.

I began: “Master, those my sight attains
Who come forward, not to be men I deem,
But don’t now what, so much me their look strains”.

And he: “Their torment’s grievous weights disseem
Their look making them crouch close to the ground:
At first my eyes fought with them as in dream.

But look steady down there: if uncurl’d found
Can be within thy mind he, who walks on
Under those stones, thou ‘ll see their breast all pound.”

O Christian folks once proud, wretched anon,
Who, blind of the mind’s sight, put a wrong trust
In steps that backward lead, not forward on,

Don’t you perceive we are but worms, who must
Become angelic butterflies, which fly
To divine justice beyond each our lust?

Through what do your proud souls float up, and why,
Since you are but as insects wretch’d with fault,
Or worms in which development falls shy?

As to sustain ceiling or roof, or vault,
A bracket in man’s shape is often seen
Bringing up to the breast its knees, all maul’d,
Which from feigned discomfort makes us keen
True pain feel; disfigur'd thus saw I those
Shades, when careful to look at them had been.

In truth, some more, some less they had bent pose
According to the load that bore each man;
And who the most to suffer shewed cause,

Weeping seemed to say: “More bear none can”.

45

46
Eleventh Chant

Father of us all, who in Heaven dwell,
Not there confined, but for greater love
Of the creatures in first celestial shell,
Prais’d be Thy name and valour in each cove
And by each being, as deserves to be prais’d
And thank’d by all Thy swift spiritual dove.

Let come to us Thy kingdom’s peace, for rais’d
To it by ourselves we cannot be,
Should it fail us, even if fully apprais’d.

As angels sacrifice their will to Thee,
Singing ‘Hosanna’, so let us our will
Defer to Thine, not wishing else to see.

Our daily manna send today, for ill
Could we otherwise provide, and back would fall,
Rather than make progress, on this cruel hill.

And as we pledge to pardon one and all
Those who have done us evil, us forgive
Lenient, on our deserts forgoing to call.

Our virtues, which defeat lightly receive,
Don’t try with Thy adversary of old;
Deliverance from him instead us give;

This last prayer, good Lord, not for our fold
Is rais’d, for we no longer need this grace,
But for those whom on earth temptations hold.”

To them and us thus wishing, gained space
Those orant shades, on whom heavy weights press
As burdens oft impress in dream their trace,

Turning in round with uneven distress,
But all fatigu’d, along the lowest grade,
Cleansing world’s superb haze with such duress.

If over there good prays are always made
For us, on our side what can be told
And made by souls with goodwill rightly inlaid?

Well us behoves aid them to cleanse their old
Marks brought with them from earth, so they can rise
To the star-spinning spheres all pure and bold.

“Would justice and compassion soon demise
Your load, so that you can swiftly take wing,
According to your wish, to Paradise;

Pray teach us on which side of this first ring
Shorter ‘s the way to mount; and should there be
More than one, where the milder ascents cling;
‘Cause is weighted with flesh this one with me
Ascending, Adam’s mortal cloth still wearing:
Against his wish with slow progress mounts he.”

We could ascertain not what was the bearing
From which the answer came to this demand
Made by the shade who had me in his caring;

But it was said: “To right-hand side come, and
With us proceeding you shall find the stair
Where a live man can mount, for being more bland.

And had I not this crushing weight to bear
Which bends my back so proud, and makes me hold
My gaze fix’d to the ground, I sure would dare

To look at that live face, whose name’s not told,
To see whether in life to me was shown,
And to inspire pity for the weights here roll’d.

Tuscan was I, from stock of great renown:
William Aldobrandesco begot me;
I wonder if this name to you was known.

So proud and haughty was I led to be
By the ancient blood and noble deeds that, naught
Caring the common mother all share we,

Every man I spited so in my thought,
I died for it: how, the Senese know, and
Even small kids where my demise was wrought.

Humbert am I; nor I alone shall stand
For pride to suffer, ’cause all of my kin
To ruinous fate drew haughtiness’ hand.

To bring this weight it behoves me herein
To pay, until enough the Lord be pleas’d,
In death, alive since I would not, this sin.”

Listening, I bent down my face; this teas’d
Another shade, not the last one to speak,
To twist under his weight, for which he wheez’d,

And my seen face from memory did seek
And call’d, fixing with pain his eyes in mine,
While I walked with them all bent and meek.

“O!” said I “Oderisi art thou, who in fine
Illuminations, as Parisians say,
Lent honour to both Gubbio and craft of thine?”

“Brother” he answer’d “finer smiling may
Be seen the pages paint’d in Bononia by
Franco, who took most honour since my day.

Not so kind in my life would have been I,
Though, for yielded my heart to the proud vice
To seek excellence which none could defy.
Of such a pride is paid herein the price;
Nor would have I come here already, had I
Not turn'd to God, when sins could still entice.

O vain renown of human mights, which die,
As a green bunch of leaves withers up fast,
If' with late ages' dimmer wits don't vie!

Yesteryear Cimabue thought himself cast
As foremost among painters; now the hue
Is of Giotto, and the former's fame 's surpass'd:

Thus from one Guido to the other flew
The glory of our tongue; and may be born
Yet who to chase both out of nest is due.

The worldly noise is nothing but wind-torn
Gust, blowing now this, now that other side,
And changing name with site from which it 's shorn.

What more voice shalt thou get, if thy man's hide
In older age is shed, than if death came
Ere thy words went from “mama” and “din-dins”wide,

After a thousand years? which shorter frame
Of time is to the eternal, than a wink
To a turn of spheres most in the sky spun lame.

He who, preceding me, with me keeps link
With such slow pace, all Tuscany made sound;
Now hardly him name in Siena dare they think,

Though he was lord of it, when hit the ground
Florence's anger, which had been then as proud
As now corrupt in whorish ways is found.

Your renown, though the world over be loud,
Is as grass' hue, which comes and goes: the sun
Makes it spring green, and makes it grey as shroud.”

And I to him: “Thy words earnestly spun
Flatten pride's swell, and my heart humble make;
But pray, reveal to me who is this one.”

“Provenzan de' Salvani”in answer spake
Oderisi “was he; and here he toils
'Cause he presum'd to his hands all Siena take.

Thus he went, and thus goes, shed all life's spoils,
Without rest: with this money pays his debt
Whoever down from pride seldom recoils.”

“If those who wait” said I “until has ebb'd
Life's tide to make repentance, have to endure
Till at hill's foot all their lifetime have wept,

Ere they ascend up here -unless some pure
Prayers shorten their stay- how comes his shade
To reach early this height could e'er procure?”
“When more haughty was living” reply made
Oderisi “unconstraining, all pride deposed,
Inside Campo di Siena his person laid,

And there, to free his friend on whom imposed
Was by Charles a ransom at life’s price,
Shivering through all veins himself exposed

(Darkly speak I, but won’t explain it twice;
Ere a short time shall pass, thy neighbours will
Make thee understand with sorry turn of dice);

This deed freed him from that low-bounded sill.”
Twelfth Chant

Head to head, as two oxen at a yoke,  
The heavy-laden shade and I would go,  
Until my kindly mentor our talkings broke;  

So, when he said: “Let them stay with their woe; 
Proceed, for here is good with oars and sail 
Each to his best to push forward his prow”,

I straighten’ed up, as it behoves to hale 
Man walking, although in my thoughts I went 
Still humbly bent and lean for the heard tale.

So I stepp’d on, and fain my pace I sent 
Behind my master’s, and we both would shew 
Again how light we were and fully unbent;

When he told me: “Turn down thy eyes: to glue 
Them to the bed where fall thy steps will be 
Good for thee: quieter path this way they ‘ll hew’.

As the tombstones above the dead let see, 
Through signs, what those there buried had once been, 
So that of them remembrance lasts; and thee

Prick many times, drawing thy tears, the keen 
Pangs of deceased’ memory, that take 
Only the pious souls and not the mean;

Thus saw I figures –of far better make 
Than earthly ones- that down there, on the floor 
Of the lane running round, of past things spake.

I saw him who was made noble much more 
Than any other creature, being thrown 
As fiery lightning down from Heaven’s door.

I saw Briareus lying dead cold there shown, 
Pierc’d by celestial dart, pressing the ground 
With crushing load of his body overgrown.

I saw that armed Pallas there was found, 
With Apollo and with Mars, beside great Jove, 
Look at limbs of slain Giants in huge mound.

I saw Nimrod’s rash work tower above 
Him, who nearly dismayed star’d at those 
Who in Sennaar with him with such pride drove.

O Niobe, with what sorry eyes there rose 
Thy effigy on the road, between thy dead 
Seven and seven sons, in statue’s pose!

O Saul, how there in Jelboe looked red 
Thy blood shed by thine own sword, after which 
Feat neither rain nor dew fell on that bed!
O fool Arachnes, rose to tragic pitch,
There paint’d, thy half-accomplish’d change to spider,
On the ill-weav’d rags of thy sorry stitch!

O Roboam, thy threats seem yet not wider
In thy image, nay, thereon full of fear
Thou art carted away, pitiful hider!

Shewn was then on the hard floor how much dear
Almeon made his mother pay, when she
Spake words, for the ill-fated jewel, too clear.

Shewn was too Sennacherib, while was he
In the temple, attack’d by his own seed
For his defeat, and left there dead to be.

Shewn were the Assyrians, routed, flee with speed,
After the slaying of Holofernes, and
What was left of his person from that deed.

Shewn was the ruin and slaughter wrought by hand
Of Tamiris, when she to Cyrus said:
“Thirsty of blood thou hast been: in blood now stand!”

Troy I saw all in caves and ashes laid:
O Ilion, how debas’d and vile thou seem’d
In the signs to which there attention’s paid!

Who so masterful ever could be deem’d
In brush or style, painting shadow and trait
With the clarity that there subtly beam’d?

Alive looked the living, dead the late
Whom I trod there; none better saw than I
Who saw real things, until I kept bent gait.

Now swell with pride, and haughtily go by,
Sons of Eve, nor care to bend your sight
So as to see the ruinous path you try!

By us more way was trod, and more of light
Of day, while round the mount we walk’d, was spent,
Than my thoughts, otherwise filled, could bite,

When he who well alert before me went
Began: “Raise now thy head; no more to go
Is time with all thy wits so wholly intent.

See over there an angel: his acts show
He will come toward us; see that the sun
Passeth its summit, starting to come low.

Reverence to thy acts and face should run,
So that it please him to send us on high;
Of thy days never shall come back this one!”

Well wont to hear his urgings yet was I
Not to lose time, so that in such thing
His words’ sense was for me not hard to pry.
To the fair creature coming forward cling
White clothes, and looks his face as looks a star
Twinkling at morning on the horizon's ring.

His arms he opens, and his wings as far
Extended, says: “Come on: the stairs are near,
And with ease to the ascent you shall be par.

Very few souls, though invit’d, come till here:
O human folks, born to fly up, why then
For breeze so light fall down, missing this sphere?”

He led us where the rock was cut, and when
He had beaten his wings across my brow,
A safe ascent he pledg’d to the upper den.

As on the right of those who upward go
To the church on the mount, that overlies
The well-rul’d town where Arno waters flow,

The daring rush of the ascent less tries
For the stairs made in age in which secure
Was the bushel, and books exempt of lies,

More bland slope there to souls the stairs assure
Than the steep cliff falling from upper ring;
But high stone walls’ close shave they must endure.

While we turn’d to the stair, voices to sing
“Beati pauperes spiritu” heard
Was in a way, no words could tell such thing.

Ah how different sounds those adits gird
Than in Hell! for there echo laments bare
And here songs sweeter than from any bird.

We were already mounting the holy stair,
And I felt, so I deem’d, lighter by much
Than I had felt on the flat lane down there.

For which I asked: “Master, whence comes such
Lightness, for which almost untir’d I go,
As if some heavy load had lift’d its touch?”

Answer’d he: “When the P’s which still thou show
On thy face, though somewhat faded, will be
All eras’d as the one that left thy brow,

Thy feet shall by goodwill wholly set free,
So that not only they won’t feel the strain,
But pleasure, going, will be felt by thee”.

I acted then as those who, walking, gain
Knowledge of thing they bear on head, afore
Unbeknownst, from the others’ gestures plain;

For which the hand seeks help to ascertain more,
And, seeking, fills the function which the sight
Cannot fulfil, finding what eyes ignore;
Thus with distended fingers of my right
I found only six letters left of those
Which on my brow the key warden did write:

This seeing, a smile on Virgil's lips arose.
Thirteenth Chant

We were now at the top of the trod stair,
Where by a second berm is cut all round
The mountain whose ascent of sins takes care:

A ledge, indeed, we saw there to surround
The slope all long its girth, as the first one;
Its arching path, though, tighter bent is found.

Signs are not seen, nor shades, over sight’s run:
Both slope and path in their sheer aspect look
Of livid stone, in hue and texture, spun.

“Should we wait passing folks to ask” then took
To say my poet “I’m afraid lest we
Perchance find with delay our choice forsook.”

His eyes then turn’d, straight on the sun to see;
On his right heel, as on a pivot, stand
Making his left-hand side sunward swang he.

“O sweet lamp, trusting which this newfound land
I enter now, I thee beseech would lead,”
Said he, “as here befits, us by thy hand.

Thou warm the world, spreading thy light’s bright seed:
If against such no reason weighs, we should
After thy rays with faith always make speed.”

As much as spans an earthly mile we could
Have already on that path advanc’d in short
Time, impell’d by our strong desire for good,

When toward us we heard unseen cohort
Of souls to come in flight, uttering cry
Alluring in kind words to love’s comfort.

The first voice which we heard over to fly
Loudly “Vinum non habent” said, and that,
Once pass’d behind, repeated by and by;

And, ere for its going afar were let
Out of hearing, another voice cried out
“I’m Horestes”, nor seem’d, as well, to set.

“Oh!” said I, “father mine, whose is this shout
We hear?” and, as I ask’d, a third one boom’d:
“Love those by whom thou suffer’d evil bout.”

And my good lord: “On souls here flogg’d once loom’d
Envy’s guilt, so by love be mov’d is right
The strands of whips by which they are now doom’d.

The restraint with dissonant notes will bite:
Methinks thou shalt hear it -mark what I say-
Ere thou come to where’s done merciful rite.
But, gazing through the air with sharper ray,
Thou shalt see folks in front of us a-sitting,
Each taking seat against the rocky bay”.

Then, sharper than hitherto forward pitting
My sight, I saw the mantled shades to lie
Against the rock, the rock’s own colour fitting.

And, as farther we pushed by and by,
More shouts, such as: “Mary, for us do pray!”
And “Michael”, “Peter”, “Saints you all” heard I.

I don’t think here on earth walks on today
A man so tough, as not to feel the prick
Of compassion for what shew’d on my way;

For, as nearer to those my gaze would stick,
So that clearer to me their gestures came,
What struck my eyes pierc’d my heart to the quick:

Rough hair-cloth wearing, each one leant his frame
On neighbour’s shoulder, and all leant in turn
On the mount’s flank, as lean on earth the lame,

Or on feast days the blind, whom dire needs burn,
At churches’ doors to beg sustenance flock,
And none to rest his head on next will spurn,

The folks’ compassion hoping thus to lock,
Not so much in beseeching words and wails,
As in their piteous sight setting high stock.

And, as to shine to sightless men sun fails,
Thus all those shades of which my tale now sounds
Heaven’s light not the least amount avails;

For cruel wire all their eyelids bounds,
Piercing and sewing them, as to hawk wild
Is done, if make him restless men or hounds.

Those souls I doubt’d by my going be ril’d
‘Cause I was able to see them, unseen:
So I star’d at Virgil, like a speechless child.

Well was he to the unasked question keen;
And thus, waiting no time to hear my will,
Said: “Speak; thy words be to the point and lean.”

Virgil was at my right, where plunges the hill
And from the ledge one could have risk’d a fall,
Since no parapet girds the outer sill;

At left the devout ghosts lining the wall
Pressed my heart so, with their grisly seam,
My cheeks were wet by tears I could not stall.

Addressing them: “O assur’d to see the beam”
I began “whose desire is the sole care
Which makes you pine for the denied high gleam,
Would grace dissolve the stains that still impair
Your conscience, so that clean through it may flow
Memory's stream, of all past sins laid bare;

Your courtesy endearingly do show
By telling, pray, if Latin souls are here;
Perchance from me to them some good shall grow.”

“Brother mine, all of us from far and near
Belong to but one city true: thou mean
Those who trod, as exiles, Italy dear.”

These words I seem’d as an answer to glean
From aught further along than where I stood:
To be heard, I deem’d fit forward to lean.

Amongst the others there I knew for good
A shade waiting, for I saw in her pose
How she rais’d, as the blind, her chin in brood.

“O soul who in thy penance thus far rose”
Said I “if thine were words which answer’d mine,
Be pleas’d thy name or land now to disclose.”

“I was from Siena,” answer’d she then; “I pine
With these souls cleansing mine from wicked deeds,
Praying with tears to God on us to shine.

Sapia by name, of sagehood lack’d the seeds;
And, much more than for my good sort, I cheer’d
For others’ adverse luck or wretched needs.

That of my sad tale’s truth thou may be clear’d,
Hear now whether I was unwise as gaged,
Already past my prime, when old age near’d.

On Colle’s land my citizens engaged
In field battle their foes; and I hard prayed
To God for that outcome their Fate then waged.

They were defeat’d, and of the rout assayed
The bitter steps; and I, seeing the chase,
Was overwhelm’d with joy they were dismayed,

So much, skyward I turn’d my reckless face,
Shouting to God: “I don’t fear Thee at last!”
As the blackbird for short fair weather’s grace.

With God I wished, my life all but past,
To make peace; and I still would be in arrear
Of the long penance that for me was cast,

Were it not that my memory was dear
To Piero Pettinaio, whose saint prays
With charity helped me my sins to clear.

But who art thou, treading our dismal ways
Wishing to know, with eyes exempt from seam,
As I surmise, and breathing out thy says?”
“My eyes too shall be seal’d to sunshine’s beam"
Said I “here, but not long, so small ’s the offence
I wrought by turning them with envious gleam.

Too much greater ’s the fear, giving suspense
To my soul, of the pain herebelow dealt,
Whose weight already I feel, nor cannot fence.”

She ask’d: “Who led thee here, up to this belt
Of ours, if down to make return thou hope?”
And I: “This one, whose voice thou hast not felt.

Now, as alive am I, ask me to cope,
O chosen soul, with what thou wish be done
On earth by me, to allay thy present mope.”

“Oh, what wonderful thing, to thee alone
Granted!” she exclaim’d; “It a sure sign I deem
God loves thee much! Pray for me to His throne;

And I ask thee, for what thou most esteem,
If ever thou shalt tread the Tuscan ground,
To mend my fame with those who mindful seem.

My next of kin among vain folks are found
Who pin their hopes on Talamone, and more
Shall lose than Siena seeking underground

Streams; but most shall there lose those to the fore.”
Fourteenth Chant

“Who is this man who’s going round our hill
Ere death has given him wings to this flight,
And opens eyes, and closes, at his will?”

“I don’t know who, but even without sight
I know he’s not alone; ask, thou who near
Him art, with words, to get him speaking, light.”

Thus two spirits, both bent, did then I hear,
On my right hand, of me keeping discourse;
They lift’d their face, their voice at me to steer;

And one of them: “O soul” said “who hold course
To heaven in thy body planted still,
Charitably for comfort of us disburse
Whence thou came and whereto leads thee thy will,
For thou make us so amazed of thy grace,
As require things unseen within this sill.”

And I: “There flows through half Tuscany’s space
A river, born on Falterona as brook,
And is not sat’d for hundred miles its trace.

From its banks did I carry body and look;
Vainly would I reveal to ye my name,
For up to now no great renown it took”.

“If thy intention rightly in my wit came
From thy words,” then replied the one who spake
Before “thou speak of Arno of well-known fame”.

And the other to him: “Why covert take
This river’s name in what he said, as man
Does for things best not nam’d for manners’ sake?”

And the shade who’d been ask’d: “For sure I can
Not say,” paid back the question “but it’s fit
To put the accursed valley’s name in ban;
‘Cause from its start, where lofty those peaks sit
That almost all the other mounts exceed
In the Alp-like range from which Peloro’s split,

Down to where it lies low, the sea to feed
Again of what the sky dries out, whence all
Water carried by streams receives its seed,

Virtues like direst foes all folks appal,
And are avoided as foul snakes, ’cause ill
Fate, or their evil habits, those enthrall.

Hence so changed their nature and their will
This wretch’d valley’s inhabitants, it seems
That Circes had them rooting at her sill.
Indeed, among foul swine, which true man deems
Worthier of acorns than of human food,
At first direct their course its dismal streams.

Then it finds curs more snarling in their mood,
Further downstream, than would call for their might,
And veers away with spite from their mad brood.

As, descending, a larger width to sight
Presents, the accursed, wretched ditch shall meet
More and more curs becoming wolves in fight.

Still lower, with dark bogs shall wet the feet
Of foxes: these so inur’d to fraud are found,
They don’t fear foreign wits that them can beat.

Nor shall I cease to say for soul around
Listening; well could it avail this man,
If he ‘ll remember what my true words sound.

I see thy grandson, become hunter, ban
Those wolves from the banks of the proud stream,
So that, dismay’d with fear, away they ran.

He sells their living flesh, and, made to seem
A wild beast of old times, them all shall kill,
Their life throwing away with his esteem.

All bloody out of the dismal wood he will
Come, leaving it such that in thousand years
Its primal state new growth shall not refill.”

As, when the news of painful damage hears,
Man is troubled, and this shows in his mien
No matter from which side will strike his fears,

Thus the other soul, who listened, was seen
Become dismay’d and turn a sorry face,
When fully intended the dire words had been.

The speech of one, and the other soul’s dismays,
Lent me desire to know their names, and fain
I made pray they would grant to me such grace;

For which the spirit that first spake, again
Began: “Thou wish to induce my will to show
And disclose what thyself from saying abstain.

But since God wants thee wondrously to go
Showing so much of His grace’s shine, I will
Not spare words: that I ‘m Guy del Duca know.

Burning envy my blood so much did fill,
Had I seen other man be glad, my heart
Would of that livid feeling become ill.

Such hay I harvest from that bad seed’s start;
O human folks, why put your longings where
Two souls the same object cannot compart?
This one 's Rainier; this the worth and fair
Honour of the house of Calbolis, where none
Inherit'd, since, the virtue of that proud lair.

And barren there went not his blood alone,
Between Po and the mounts, Reno and the sea,
Land shorn of good that formerly so shone,

'Cause within those four bounds the ground must be
Full of poisonous shrubs, so that late thou
Would, to till it, the earth from them set free.

Where 's Lizio? And Harry of Mainardi how Trace? Where Guy of Carpigna, and Piero where Traversaro? O Romagna folks, made now

Bastards! When in Bononia a Fabbro holds chair?
When Bernard Fosco in Faenza again
Stands, gentle sprout of a small plant and fair?

Don't marvel, Tuscan soul, if my tears rain,
When I remember Ugo d'Azzo, who liv'd
With us, and Guy da Prata without stain;

Federico Tignosi and those receiv'd
As his friends; and how both the seats neglected
Of Piero and Anastagi went bereav'd;

And the ladies and knights, the souls affected
And the good life, that courtesy endear'd
And love to hearts by evil now so infected.

O Bertinoro, why elsewhere hast steer'd
Thou not, since all thy family with great
Crowd of impious folks thy land has clear'd?

Well did Bagnacavallo its seed to abate;
And not so Como and Castrocaro, where
Evil lords more and more have spawn'd of late.

Well shall the Pagan do, since of them care
Shall take the Devil; but not so, that pure
Witness of them could ever the world spare.

O Ugo of Fantolin, well stays secure
Thy name, since none is wait'd who it could make
In later times, by going awry, obscure.

But now go away, o Tuscan soul, 'cause take
My heart much more the teary moods than will
To say, so tightly I mourn for my land's sake."

We knew that pierc'd those benign souls' ears'sill
The sound of our steps; their silence made
Us confident beyond to proceed still.

Further on gone, when not a single shade
Was near us, as a lightning from the sky
A voice sounded in front, and these words said:
“By whoever reaches me, killed shall I
Be”; and died out just as the thunder dies,
If in rain all at once the cloud falls by.

As our hearing with it no longer vies,
Another voice takes on, with as loud sound
As second thunderclap with the first ties:

“Aglauros I’m, who turn’d to stone was found”;
And then, against the Poet to sidle, I
Step to the right, instead of gaining ground.

Quiet again on all sides the skies then lie;
And said Virgil: “That was the severe writ
Which, as bit, man should ever be rein’d by.

But ye rise to the bait, and the hook once bit
With ease the old adversary will draw
Ye to his will: no brake, or call, is fit

By which Heaven calls ye, spinning around
To shew its beauty eternal; but your eyes
Uncaringly their gaze keep to the ground,

For which hits ye Who all your actions spies.”
Fifteenth Chant

What space the disc of Sun, in childlike whim
Playing with clouds, is wont to take between
The dawn and the third hour in daily trim,
That much toward the night be left was seen
Of its afternoon course; thus in that place
’Twas vespers, and midnight would here have been.

And the rays right in front struck on our face,
Since straight pointed our eyes against sunset:
Thus far around the mount had led our pace.

I felt then on my forehead the weight set
Of a much brighter splendour than before,
This new thing being by me with wonder met,
And I must raise both of my hands afore
My brows, against the glare making them screen,
To shade the dazzle which my sight made sore.

As when from water or from mirror ’s seen
Rebound a ray toward the opposed side,
Rising the way its descending had been,
And from the falling stone’s direction wide
-As experience and art alike us teach-
Depart same space both ways for equal ride,
Thus a reflected glare seemed to reach
My eyes from just in front; for which was I
To avert my sight quick, and to utter speech:

“What is this, father sweet, hard as I try
Impossible to screen from sight,” I said
“And seeming straight toward us both to fly?”

“Thou should not wonder if despite any shade
A Heaven’s son is dazzling thee” replied:
“He ’s sent to invite thee mount on higher grade.

Thou shalt but a small time be call’d to bide
Ere not annoy, but joy shall bring to thee
These things, as nature spreads thy senses wide.”

After we came near the bless’d angel, he
With happy voice told us: “Come in this way,
By this stair which less steep happens to be”.

We mounted on, forsaking any stay;
When we heard: “Bless the merciful” in song
And “Thy victory enjoy!” folks aft to say.

I and my master both mount’d on along
The stair, alone; and I thought while we went
Gain profit from his words could not be wrong;
So I address'd him words to this intent:
“What meant the shade born in Romagna, by
The words ‘spouse’ and ‘forbiddance’ which he spent?”

And he: “The pains which his marr’d soul here try
For his most grievous vice, he knows; therefore
Don’t wonder if he chides us, lest we cry.

Envy makes earthly breasts with sighing sore
‘Cause their desires point toward objects such
That each gets less from parting among more.

But if the love of supreme sphere should touch
Your souls, upward diverting each your care,
This fear would not oppress your hearts so much,

Because, many as can say “our” up there,
All the more good by each of them’s possessed,
And more charity burns in that clear air.”

“Hungrier am I to have my wish addressed”
Said I “than if just now thou had held quiet,
And still more doubts are in my mind compressed.

How can it be that a good make, in spite
Of being partition’d to more owners, those
Richer, than if but few that good can bite?”

And he: “Because thy mind thou still dispose
To earthly things alone, from my true light
In thy thoughts fruits of darkness yet arose.

That without bounds and unspeakable might
As dwells up there, to love comes running fast
As run light’s rays to bodies shining bright.

The more ardour it finds, the more is cast
On the soul; thus, as wide those ardours spread,
On it the eternal value’s growth will last.

And the more folks up there to love are led,
More there is to be lov’d, and more of it
From each to each, as from mirrors, is fed.

And, should thou be not sated by me, thy wit
Shall see its cravings once for all repealed,
When Beatrice thou shalt see, to the last bit.

Take rather care that the five sores be healed
Soon, as have been hitherto cur’d the two,
Which through repentance only become sealed.”

Just as I want’d to say: “No more I do
Ask”, I perceiv’d we were on the next grade,
For whose fair lights my voice then fail’d to accrue.

My thoughts all of a sudden, in that glade,
Into an ecstatic vision, lo! were sent:
A large crowd in a temple saw I laid,
And a woman, motherly acting, went
Inside, in sweetness asking: "Why, my son,
Did thou behave to us with such intent?

See, thine father and I anxious anon
Came here looking for thee." And as she ceas'd
To speak, by a new one the image was won:

Another woman appear'd indeed, displeas'd
So strongly against someone, that down her cheeks
That water which means sorrow ran and creas'd.

"Pisistratus," cried she “this mother seeks
Vengeance from thee toward those arms so rash
To hug our daughter, if in thee yet speaks

The might of thy fair city, seed of clash
Between the Gods, from which all knowledge gleams!”. And the king, not in fury nor abash,

Answer'd with benign mien her tearful screams:
“What should man do to those who bear us hate,
If for those who bear love vengeance right deems?”

Then saw I folks in heat of fury, irate
Against a youth, whom they were stoning, high
Shouting but: “Kill! Kill him!” without rebate.

And him I saw bending to ground, fell'd by
The grievous yoke of death on him already,
But ever making doors of eyes to sky,

Asking the supreme King to grant a ready
Forgivance, in such war, to the cruel crowd,
With look unlocking pity deep and steady.

When my soul had come back out of that shroud
To things outside which as real essence stand,
To be vain, but not false, I knew that cloud.

My leader, who was seeing close at hand
How I was bearing like a man a-waking,
Said: “What takes thee, to lose thy limbs' command?

Thou came a good half league with both legs shaking
And veiled eyes, in guise of man whose wit
Is dimm'd for sleep or wine his strength out taking.”

“Sweet father mine, if thou shall but hear it,
I 'll tell thee what” I said “to me was shewn
When on my legs I felt, walking, unfit.”

And he: “One hundred masks, or more, were sewn
Over thy face, foreclos'd to me hardly would
Be thy thoughts, though so seem'd, but clearly strewn.

What thou just saw was lest refuse thou should
To open heart to the waters of peace
Which are spread from the eternal source of good.
I did not ask 'What takes thee?' 'cause I miss Aught, as one who looks on without clear sight At man whose body lies witless, amiss;

But asked so to give thy foot new might: Thus it behoves be prodd'd the lazy, gaining But slowly avail of wit's returning light.”

In the vesper we went along, a-straining Our sight to carry more than eyes could tell Against the shining rays of sunlight waning,

When by and by a smoke would rise and swell Toward the two of us, darker than night, Nor was there any place to avoid its spell:

Bereft we were of clear air and clear sight.
Sixteenth Chant

Darkness of Hell, or of a black deep night
Devoid of any star, under clos'd sky
By stormy clouds' thick overcast made tight,
Never with denser veil had cover'd my
Face, as the smoke that there clad us; nor felt
As rough upon the skin its prick to try;
So to stay open wide my eye rebell'd,
And my wise leader, coming nearer, lent
His shoulder, though no word by me was spell'd.

As blind man by his guide is led, intent
Not to get lost and not to strike unseen
Things which could harm, or even kill, I went
Through that bitter soil'd air, and I was keen
To listen to my leader, who would say
Now and again: “Don't lose touch with thy dean!”

I heard voices, and each seemed to pray
Imploring mercy and peace from the high grace
Of God's lamb, who all sins shall take away.

Only “Agnus Dei”, indeed, is the first trace
Of their songs, which but one in words appear
And in tone, with such concord sound their ways.

“Are they spirits, my master, those I hear?”
Said I. And he replied: “True thought thou weave,
And anger's knot they are untying here”.

“Now who art thou, our smoky air to cleave,
Speaking of us as if thy time were beat
On calendar which mortal wits perceive?”

These words were spoken by a voice; and fleet
My master said: “Answer to him, and ask
Whether the upward path this way we 'll meet”.

And I: “O creature intent to the task
Of cleansing to return fair to the eye
Of thy Maker, in wonder thou shall bask
Coming with me”. “As I 'm allow'd, I 'll try”
He answer'd; “and if this dark smoke as blind
Makes us, with hearing thou 'll be joined and I.”

I began then: “With the flesh ties that bind
The soul ere death, I 'm still; with those I mount,
And through all Hell's distress here up I wind.

And since God held me inside His grace's account,
To the point that He 'll shew me His high reign
In a way wholly unused in our count,
Don't hide who thou hast been in life, but deign
To tell me, and tell whether the right way
To the passage I tread; thy words we fain
Shall follow." "Lombard born, me Mark would say
That world I knew, loving those virtues now
Aim at your slacken'd bows no longer may.

To go up straight ahead move on." That's how
He answer'd, adding then: "Prithee, take care
To pray for me, when on the summit thou
Shall be". "I pledge" said I "with all my fair
Faith to do what thou ask; but in a doubt
I shall soon burst, if I don't solve the snare.

One was before, and double now comes out,
In thy sentence which makes me certain here
As elsewhere, the thing that puts me in rout.

Of all virtues the world bereft appear
Assuredly, as thou clearly signify,
And pregnant with the malice looming near;

But I pray thee to explain the reason why,
Which one in fate, one in man's will would place,
So that to know and shew to all can I."

Deep sigh, which for the sorrow chang'd its trace
To an "Ah!", the shade first vented, and then said:
"Brother, the world, and thou with it, blind face

Turn. In your life all cause by ye is laid
Up in the heavens, as if all to spin
With them by sheer necessity were made.

Should things thus stand, necessity would win
In ye free will, nor just reward would be
To reap bliss for good deeds, nor pain for sin.

Start'd by the heavens are your acts, thou see,
Not wholly; but even if all were so,
To sift malice from good you've light; and free

Will were ye given, that, if tiresome go
At first endures to win some stars'ill bent,
Ever prevails, if right food makes it grow.

Greater might and a better nature lent
To ye freedom; and those in ye create
The mind, which by the heavens is not pent.

Therefore, if present things degenerate,
In ye the cause is found, in ye be sought;
And of true reason I shall now thee sate.
From the fingers of God, who had it thought
Ere it was, in the guise of newborn lass
Whose feelings but of laughs and tears are wrought,
The simple soul into the world will pass,
Nought knowing but to turn fain, being born
Of joy, to things that joy will not harass.
Puny goods which their sweet savours adorn
Shall first, enticing, mislead it to run
To them, if of all guide or brake it ‘s shorn.
For which it was deem’d fit that laws were spun,
And that men should have king, who could discern
Of the true city’s towers at least one.
Laws there are; but who’ll make them work with stern
Hand? None, for the only shepherd in your guide
Can digest knowledge, but has not twain learn;
For which the folks, who see their shepherd ride
But to those goods of which they all have greed,
Of such feed, and no further shall abide.
Well canst thou see that the evil life ye lead
Is the cause why the world so wicked ‘s made,
Not a presum’d corruption of your seed.
Was wont Rome, by which good laws were laid,
To have two suns, which shewed the twofold way:
One to the world, heed to God the other paid.
One sun put out the other, and the arms stay
With the crook; and the two powers it ’s fit
Together in ill guise perforce hold sway;
‘Cause, join’d, none fears the other’s checking writ;
If thou believe me not, pay heed to crop,
For any root by its produce is lit.
Where Adige and the Po through the land drop,
Courtesy could upon a time be found
And virtue, ere Frederick had met the stop:
Now could trespass there safely the bound
Whoever should consider not to do
For fear of meeting good men on that ground.
It ’s true that three old men still live there, who
Are reproach of the old to the new age,
And cannot wait till God to Him them woo:
Conrad Palazzo I mean, Gerald the sage
And Guy da Castel, in name better made
‘The simple Lombard’ in the Gauls’usage.
The Roman Church can nowadays be said,
To confound in itself two powers, fall
In the mud, soiling both beyond all aid.”
“O, Mark mine,” said then I “right sounds thy call;
And now I see why from heirloom Levite
Progenies justly were excluded all.

But which Gerald is this as wise thou cite,
Sole witness left of the deceased brood,
The wild new generation more to spite?”

“Either thy words deceive, or else they should
Entice me more to say; thy Tuscan lilt
Makes it hard to believe of him thou would

Know not. By other name than Gerald bill’d
-if not from daughter Gaia- I never heard
Him; now be God with ye: here I ’ll be still’d.

See a whiteness dawning through the smokes that gird
Us; it behoves I retrace the dark walk
Ere I ’m seen: in that light keeps watch God’s bird.”

So he turned, nor suffer’d further talk.
Seventeenth Chant

Recall, reader -if ever thou wert caught
In a high alp by mist, and as through a skin
Thy own sight, like a mole's, was blurred aught-

How, when the moist and thick vapours begin
To thin out some, the sun's resplendent face
Enfeebled beams through them at first sends in:

Then thy imagination lightly 'll trace
The pale sight that I came again to get
There of the sun, near to its setting place.

Thus, while my steps with equal speed were let
As my master's, I came out of that cloud
When but on summit the sun's rays were set.

O imagination which our mind so shroud
From outside world, that man does not perceive
Even a thousand trumpets' blaring loud!

Who, if by senses naught dost thou receive,
Moves thee on? Surely a light which highly is lit,
Down seeping, or sent us by will to give.

Thus came the image into my inner wit
Of the evil deed of her whose self was caught
Into the bird's that to sing sweetly is fit;

And so clos'd on itself became my thought,
Hardly could I comprise within my mind,
Of what from outside strove to enter, aught.

My high brooding was then stricken to find
The image of a fierce man who, crucified,
Spiteful in sight, to death was thus destin'd:

The great Assuer was seen standing beside,
Esther his spouse and Mardocai the just,
Who us'd in word and deed the right to abide.

And, as this vision break apart then must,
All by itself, as, wanting depth, shall crack
Unbid a bubble, reaching water's crust,

A wench's image rose up from my mind's back;
She, crying all her tears, said: "Why, my queen,
Thyself, in anger, put of life in lack?

To lose not thy Lavinia, thou hast been
Deprived of her! Here, mother, mourn now I
Thy loss, rather than him whom mourn thou mean."
As snap dreams of a sudden—when shines by
A strong new light, the clos’d eyelids hitting—
Which a last darting make before they die,

Thus from my mind all those images were flitting
As soon as a fierce blaze shone on my face,
Far brighter than for human eyes is fitting.

I turned then, to see my present place:
“Here the road mounts” a voice was heard to say, 
Which cancel’d in my thought any other trace;

And my will was so eager to find way
To see who had so loud appear’d to speak,
That it, till sat’d, to rest I could not lay.

But as to stare at sun our sight is weak
For dazzling sheen that shields its figure bright,
Thus my virtue was here wanting and bleak.

“This is a divine spirit, on the right
Path sending us without waiting our pray,
Hiding himself within his radiant light,

To us behaving as to himself man may;
‘Cause he who waits request or open need
Wickedly leans toward selfish naysay.

To his high command we should now match our speed:
Better had we to mount ere darkness falls,
Or new day we should wait to achieve such deed.”

So spake Virgil; with him to obey the calls
I turn’d my steps up a stairway, and there,
As soon as the first grade hit my footfalls,

I felt near me as a wing beating air
And blowing in my face and saying: “Bless’d
The peaceful, who ’re without anger unfair!”

Above us had already as much progress’d
The last rays which precede the onset of night,
That to all sides of sky the stars access’d.

“Why art thou waning so, my sinews’ might?”
To myself I was asking, for I felt
My legs’ strength become weaker with the light.

The stair no longer mounted where we dwelt,
And we stood there, as vessel come to shore
Stands, no longer by sails or oars impell’d.

And, unproceeding, waited I some more,
Striving to hear if something would sound

212
From the next ring, until I ventur'd fore:

“Sweet father mine, upon this higher ground
Where we stand, what offense is to be clean'd?
Thy speech be alert, though our feet be bound.”

And he: “The love of its first duty wear'd
Is here atoned for; here hard must row
All those who on tardy oars in life have lean'd.

But so that more overt truth thou may know,
Turn thy mind toward me, and thou shalt find
Good avail of this stay while light is low.”

“Both creator and creature feel in bind
Of love, my son,” began my master's tale,
"Either inborn or will'd; this knows thy mind.

Love that from nature comes never can fail,
But the other kind can err for misled aim,
Or, for excess or want, come to no avail.

Whenever to first goodness striv'd its claim,
Or measuredly to goods which thence descended,
Wick'd delectation from it never came.

But when was bent to evil aims, or tended
Too strongly, or not enough, toward just ends,
Against the Maker was its might intended.

From this thou shalt have learned how love lends
Man the seeds of all virtue, and as well
Of all deed that to pains well-earned sends.

Now, since from one's own good cannot dispell
Love its intent, that all created things
From self-hating be safe reason shall tell;

And since no thing can be, unless it clings
To the first root, nor can from this be shorn,
None 's bound from hating God to suffer stings.

Thus, if in thee sound discerning is born,
Of neighbour's evil's only thou shalt see
Love: by three kinds thy slimy world is torn.

Some hope, if neighbours are downtrod, to be
To excellence rais'd, and for such desire
Them from high state to fall expect with glee;

To lose grace, honour, fame some harbour dire
Dread, if a neighbour should more than them rise,
And the contrary love with wicked ire;
And some grow, for offence, anger unwise,
So that vengeance they crave with wicked heart,
And them behoves to seek neighbour's demise.  

This triply shaped love the mount's low part
Weeps; now listen about the other kind
Which with corrupted run follows just start.

You men blurredly see within your mind
A good to appease the soul, and that good crave;
Thus a way to join it each strives to find.

If slack love to reach it in life you gave
Or it to contemplate, within this ring
After proper repent just pain you have.

Unfit to make man happy, each earthly thing
Set apart from first good is not the true
Essence, the root from which all just fruits spring.

The love of those, when push'd to excess undue,
In three rings above us thou 'll see lamented;
But how triply it 's laid on I 'll not construe,

That by thyself may seek and be contented".
To his reasoning’s end at last, thus, went
The high doctor, and held on me his stare
To ascertain whether I appear’d content;

And I, to whom new thirst was lent to bear,
Outside was silent, within thinking: “My
Questions load him, perchance, of heavy care”.

But that true father, who too well did spy
My covert will which bashfulness made hid,
By speaking let me again on speech rely.

Thus I: “Master, thy light so lifts the lid
From my eyes, that I can most clearly see
What thy explaining reasons to me bid.

For which, my sweet dear father, I pray thee
This love, to which thou all good deeds by right
Ascribe as the bad ones, to explain to me.”

“If thou” said he “my words with keen mind’s sight
Hear, manifest shall be within thy wit
How blind leads blind in error worth of spite.

The soul, created to love quickly fit,
Is mov’d by any endearing object, when
The pleasure shall in act have woken it.

From real things the knowing virtue of men
Takes its intent, deploying it within,
And makes your soul turn to it eager then;

And if the soul, thus turn’d, lets intent win
Bending to it, that ‘s love, that ‘s nature’s way
That for novelty’s sake you’re bonded in.

Then, as the fire ascends to higher bay
After its essence, informed to mount
There where its matter more endures to stay,

Thus the soul caught by love longs for the fount
Of that love, and is this the spirit’s trend,
As long as the lov’d things for joy account.

Now thou can judge how much in need of mend
Is the opinion of folks who hold that be
Each love praiseworthy thing, because they lend

Perchance to its matter goodness, as they see
It; but not always are good signs impress’d
By the seal, though on wax that is fault-free.”

“My wit, following words by thee express’d”
Replied I “what is love discover’d now,
But into greater doubt I thus ingress’d;
For, if love from outside is born, as thou
Said, and our souls no other footing gain,
Deserts for right or wrong ascribe we how?"

And he to me: "What reason can make plain
Is all I may tell thee; beyond that, wait
For Beatrice, her in whom faith's deeds have lain.

Any substantial form that, separate
From matter, nonetheless with it is join'd,
Has some virtue as its specific trait;

This is not felt if not of act in point,
Nor otherwise is patent than by action,
As life is shewn in plant by verdant joint.

However, whence derives of intellection
The first principles, man 's not fit to know,
Nor whence of first desires derives the affection,

Which is but yours, as in the bee thrusts grow
To make honey; and this primeval will
Deserves not to be prais'd, nor be held low.

Now to make any other wish to fill
The first's trend, is inborn in ye the wise
Reason, that of assent must hold the sill.

From this source then the rightly causes arise
Of deserving the blame or praise, when men
Wicked or worthy love choose as their prize.

Those who have fathom'd reason's deepest den
Perceiv'd this inborn freedom clearly, and light
Left to the world of moral rule since then.

Therefore, even if had compelling might
Each love that within ye takes fire, yet stays
The power in your soul that love to fight.

Free will 's the word used in Beatrice's ways
When speaking of this noble virtue; care
To hold this in thy mind, when she thus says."

The moon, at late midnight rising, would pare
Around it -in our sight- the stars' bright swath,
While like a copper pan's would shine its glare;

And against heaven's spin she trod that path
Enflam'd by sun when for the Roman men
Between Corsica and Sards its setting hath.

That kind shade after whom his natal den,
Pietole, more renown'd than Mantua is much,
From weighty burden had reliev'd me then;

For which I, who on my doubts received such
Plainly displayed reasons, went my way
As man who in dreaming stupor 's out of touch.
But this somnolence soon was cast away
When we perceived behind us to come
Folks that, circling the hill, reached our bay.

And as Boetia’s rivers saw at some
Past age at night tumultuous crowds to run
When Thebans sought from Bacchus’ happy outcome,

In the same hurried way their fast strides spun,
Coming forward, for what I saw, the shades
Whom good will rides and a just love’s blows stun.

They were soon upon us, for through those glades
All were running so fast in the large throng;
And two in front cried in tears, as seeking aids:

“In hurry Mary to the mount along
Ran; and to subdue Ilerda, Caesar’s host
Struck Marseille, ere to Spain he threw his prong”.

“Hurry on, lest a precious time be lost
For want of love” the others shout’d behind;
“Cause care of doing good deeds stokes grace the most.”

“O folks in whom keen fervour of the mind
Atones, methinks, at present the neglect
Of good deeds delay’d by your tepid kind,

This one who lives, as my true words affect,
Wishes to mount, provided the sun shine;
Thus tell us, pray, where best the ascent to effect.”

These words were spoken then by Virgil mine;
And of those spirits one said: “After me
Come, and thou ’ll find the gate to next incline.

So full of wish to proceed on are we,
That we cannot take rest; forgive us, pray,
If our pain lack of kindness seems to be.

In San Zeno I was abbot, when it lay
Under the rule of Frederick, the steady
Emperor for whom Milan saw sore day.

And such one foot has in the grave already,
Who soon my former abbey ’ll have to weep,
And shall feel sorry that with might grew heady;

For he gave the holy seat, as his to reap,
To his son -hardly whole of body, of mind
Still worse, ill born- instead of to true keep.”

If he said some more words I could not find,
So far from us he had trespassed fast;
But this I heard, and this here fain assign’d.

And he who in my succour ever cast
His wisdom, said: “Turn there: two more thou ’ll see
Biting their slothful sin: they ’ll soon run past”.
They closed the rear saying: “Ere were set free
To cross Jordan their heirs, were dead all those
For whom Moses divided the Red Sea;

And the folks who to shun all troubles chose,
Rather than follow to the end the pains
Of Aeneas, their good fame thus did foreclose.”

Then, when those shades so far had trod the plains
That we lost sight of them, new thought was spawn’d,
Unimpeded by senses, in my brains,

And from it many more gradually dawn’d,
Diverse and strange; and so long did I stray
From one to next, that with clos’d eyes I yawn’d,

And from thought into dream I pass’d away.
Nineteenth Chant

In the hour when the diurnal heat no more
Can warm up Moon’s advancing frigid air;
For Earth’s or Saturn’s cold comes to the fore;

When the geomancers, before dawn, see their
‘Greater Fortune’ rise in the East, through way
That to light up has little time to spare;

In my dream came a woman with lame say,
Cross-eyed, with twisted feet and missing hands,
Over whose face wan hue deep pallor lay.

I look at her; and as the Sun commands
New warmth to course the veins by night aggrieved,
Thus my gaze loosens up her tongue; she stands

In a short time already straight, reliev’d
From her limping; the haggard face gets back
The rosy hue that is from love receiv’d.

As her speech was again flowing on track,
She began singing in a voice so pure,
Hardly could I of such have borne the lack.

“I am,” she sang “a siren, whose allure
Bewitches sailors plying the high sea;
So full of pleasure do my songs endure!

From his coveted journey, to hear me,
Ulyxes stray’d; and man who takes to mine
Ways, seldom leaves; so fully sat’d feels he!”

Her mouth was not yet closed, when, in line
With me, readily a saint female appear’d
To confound her in spite of her new shine.

“Virgil, oh Virgil, who here rashly near’d?”
Heatedly said; and forward he did press,
Gazing but her whose earnest say endear’d;

Putting hand to the first, in front her dress
He open’d, tearing up the cloth; I then
Woke, ’cause her belly stank of awful mess.

I turn’d my eyes around, and my lord: “Ten
Times I raised my voice! Rise and come” said:
“Let’s find the door through which is reach’d next den.”

I rose up: of high day saw full each grade
Of the holy mountain; we began the ascent,
While the new sun its rays on our back laid.

Following Virgil, my forehead I’d sent
Low, as a man whom heavy burdens weigh
Down, -that as bridge’s half-arch his back is bent-
When I heard “Forward come; here is the way”
Spoken with benign voice in mellow tone,
Such as none ever ’s heard on earth to say.

With open wings, as a swan's, through the stone
Of the hard walls, he who so spoke made sign
We should walk, and up on the stair be gone.

His feathers beating “Those who in sorrow pine,
In bliss' said fanning us then “shall rejoice,
For solace shall abide their souls' confine”.

“What for still to look down makest thou choice?”
My leader ask'd thereafter, when but few
Steps we had mount'd, above the angel's voice.

And I: “New dream in such fierce doubt me threw
Bending my wit even as on I go,
That all my thoughts from it never withdrew”.

“Thou saw” he said “that ancient witchlike foe
But for which above us is wept by now;
And thou hast seen how man can win her woe.

Suffice it, and step faster on; look how
Revolves the grand spheres’ wheels turn’d in the sky
By the everlasting King’s almighty vow.”

At these words as the hawk was changed I,
Which first looks at its feet, then turns and leans
Toward its prey, for shouts it 's called by;

And as far as the rock’s cleavage gives means
To those ascending to proceed, I went
Till where its wall next ring no longer screens.

As into the fifth circle was I sent,
I saw strewn there new folks across my way,
Lying on ground face downwards, in tears bent.

“My soul clung to the floor” I heard them say
With sighs so high, that hardly could be intended
The words they utter'd as penance or pray.

“O ye chosen by God, whose pains are blended
With hope and justice which somewhat them cure,
Address us to where higher can be ascended.”

“If ye come safe from the lying we endure,
And through the shorter way ye want to advance,
To keep your right on the outer rim procure.”

Thus had spoken the Poet making stance,
And thus not far in front came the reply;
The hidden mouth I knew from such parlance,

And my eyes to my lord's then turned I,
For which with happy mien nodd’d he the assent
To the desire of which my glance was spy.
As permission was grant’d to my intent,  
I drew myself above the creature lying  
Whose words had earlier my attention bent,  

Saying: “O soul in whom matures, through crying,  
That without which to God man can’t return,  
Cease a short time with thy great pain from vying.  
And tell me who thou wert, and why you turn  
Upward your backs; and tell whether some grace
To seek, there whence I came, thou dost not spurn.”

And he to me: “Why Heavens shuns our face  
And turns to it our back, thou ’ll learn; but know,  
First, that I follow’d holy Peter’s pace.  
Between Chiavari and Sestri the fair flow  
Running to the low grounds, with its own name  
Gave to the title of my blood high glow.

In a month, not much more, to know I came  
How heavy the great mantle is on those  
Preserving it from mud, so much that tame  
All other burdens seem. And late arose  
My will to convert, alas! but as made  
Was I the Roman shepherd, did disclose  
Its lies to me man’s life. And did not fade  
From heart the unrest, nor in that life I could  
Rise higher; thus in love of this I bade.

Until that point my wretched soul had stood  
Sever’d from God, wholly miser inside:  
Now, as thou seest, I’m here punish’d for good.  
What avarice has wrought, man can’t here hide,  
In our conversion’s penance being declar’d;  
Bitterer pain ’s not found on this mount’s side.

And as our eyes but for earth’s things have car’d,  
Failing to rise to higher aim above,  
Thus justice here keeps them to the ground pair’d.  
As avarice from all good deed our love  
Put off, so that was lost what could be wrought,  
Thus here justice keeps us bound in this cove,  
Shackled and held in hand and foot; and ought  
We motionless to lie as long here prone,  
As by the just lord’s pleasure right is thought.”

I had knelt down, and words wanted to intone;  
But as I had begun and he perceiv’d  
My humble pose by listening alone,  
“Why to bend down thus far hast thou conceiv’d?”  
Said he; and I to him: “From your high role  
My conscience to stand up remorse receiv’d”.
“Straighten thy legs upright, rise, brother! Sole
One power binds me alike with thee” replied;
“Error would be thy respects here to dole.

If ever thou intended what ‘s implied
By the evangelic ‘Neque nubent’ say,
Thou ‘ll clearly see why thus my pride is tied.

But go on now: I beg thee not to stay,
For thy stop here, having my weeping stall’d,
Impedes my progress along penance’s way.

A niece I have on earth, Alagia call’d,
Of good nature, unless our wicked breed
Makes by example her in sin enthrall’d;

And only her I have left of my seed.”
Twentieth Chant

Against a better will man's will can't fight;
For which, against my pleasure, him to please,
I drew the sponge out from the water light.

I started; and my leader had to seize
The free path to the rock wall lying close,
As along narrow trench the sentries squeeze,
'Cause to the outside too much were crowding those
Folks shedding drop to drop, from teary eyes,
The evil greeds that on all world impose.

Curse on thee, female wolf in ancient guise,
Who more than all the other beasts hast prey
For thy dark hunger without end unwise!

O heavens, for whose motions we men say
All our earthbound conditions change and vary,
When will come he who her shall chase and slay?

Slowly we went and with short steps, and wary
Was I, all intent to the shades, whom felt
I piteously complaining, in tears chary;

And "Sweet Mary!" by chance I heard then spell'd,
In front of us, with weeping call, as cries
A woman bearing child, by pain compell'd;

And going on: "How poor thou wert, man spies
In seeing how the abode was wretch'd, were bore
Thou the bless'd Child sent as gift from the skies".

Followed then: "Good Fabritius, as poor
Man thou chose to live virtuous, rather than,
Living in vice, set by world's riches great store".

I lik'd these words so much I went, to scan
From which of the sad spirits seem'd to have come
The voice, farther along the crowded span.

On generous Nicholas spent he some
Further words, speaking of the dowry he gave
To grant to three girls' youth honour'd outcome.

"O soul who such good language seem to have,
Tell who thou wert" said I "and why alone
Thou of these worthy praises thy speech pave.

Not without deign reward shall sound thy tone,
If I 'll go back to achieve the short term set
For that life which to fly to its end is known."

And he: "I shall tell thee, not so I get
Comfort from those in life, but because such
Grace shines in thee ere thy last day thou met.
I was the root of the evil tree that much
Shade throws upon the whole of Christian land,
From which good fruit seldom the world can touch.

But, if could Douai, Lille and Bruges with Gand,
Soon vengeance would be made of their bad deeds;
And I ask it from judge who can command.

Hugues Chapet was I call'd on earth; my seeds
Were the Philippe and Louis, many so nam'd,
Who in recent times led France, and one still leads.

Scion of a cattle dealer who was fam'd
In Paris, when the ancient kings surceas'd
All, save one in the monks' sackcloth asham'd,

I found clench'd in my fist the reins releas'd
Of the whole kingdom's ruling, such new might
Of purchase, and so many friends who pleas'd

Me, that I could promote to heirloom's right
Of the widowed crown my son; from him
Began the blood of those made kings by rite.

As long as Provence's dowry let shame trim
The greed of my descendants, their deeds, though
Worth little, yet with evil did not brim.

Thereafter force and lie began to show
In their plunderous acts; in penance's guise
Gascony with Ponthieu, Normandy low

They took. Charles in his turn did then devise
To raid Italy, and Conrad slew; to atone
For that, to heaven then made Thomas rise.

A time I now foresee, from today none
Too much remov'd, when a new Charles comes out
Of France, better to enhance his good renown.

Unarmed he proceeds, putting in rout
His foes with Judas' lance, which he so thrusts
In Florence's belly, its bowels outward spout.

Not land, but sin and shame from these his lusts
He 'll gain, all the more grievous for his fate,
That light he 'll deem the damage his soul busts.

The other, who was caught on ship, pirate
Seems to me, 'cause he 'll sell his daughter, whose
Price he will, as the corsairs do, debate.

Of what else, avarice, shall I now choose
To accuse thee, since my blood thou hold so tight,
Even its flesh it cares no more to lose?

To make less bad to appear the infringed right
Past and future, I see in Alagni brought
By fleur-de-lys to Christ's vicar new plight:
Again derided I see him and caught,
The vinegar and bile renewed; I see
Him among living thieves by killers sought.

I see the new Pilate so cruel to be,
He’s not sat’d by all this, but greedy sail
He brings to Temple without Pope’s decree.

O my Lord, when at last shall me avail
To see thy vengeance, in thy secret will
Ordain’d, to nurture sweetly thy ire’s trail?

What I said of the bride who did fulfil
The love of the Holy Ghost, the words that made
Thee turn to me to ask, these we speak till

The light of day endures; when sun’s rays fade,
Our prays and antiphon change nature; so
Contrary song at night sounds in this glade.

Pygmalion we recall then: our words show
How traitor, thief and parricide he went
‘Cause above all priz’d gold his hunger low;

And the misery of Midas then is meant
To be recall’d, reply to his greedy pray,
For which men in all ages to laugh were bent.

Of mad Achan then all of us would say,
How he stole the war's spoils, so that the ire
Of Joshua seems to bite him to this day.

Saphira and husband our accuse inspire;
We praise then Heliodorus’ kick and blow;
And around all the hill resound and gyre

The sins of Polynestor, whom we show
Murdering Polydore: at last we shout:
'Crassus, tell us, how tastes gold? Thou know!’

Sometimes one speaks but low, sometimes loud out,
According to the affection spurring on
Each to a slow walk or to a speeding bout;

Thus, on the daylight tales of good, anon
Not I alone was intent; but here nigh
The silence by none other voice was won.”

Already had depart’d Virgil and I,
And were intent in gaining of the way
As much as our strength allow’d to try,

When I felt, as for weight falling away,
The mount to shake; for which an ice-cold fear
Took me, as takes a man at his last day.

Delos’ earthquake for sure had been not quite
So strong, ere Leto made on it her nest
Where she bore of the sky the twain eyes bright.
Then from all sides a cry arose, and lest I fear, near me my master came, and said: “Be not in doubt; I ’ll lead thee for the best”.

“Gloria in excelsis Deo” is what I made
From those who shout’d near me, so that I could intend their words amidst the noisy glade.

Suspended, without motion there we stood,
As the shepherds who first had heard that song,
Until shaking and cry at once cease would.

Then on our blessed path we went along,
As their weeping resum’d the shades prostrate,
Whom we beheld while those we pass’d among.

Never the lack of knowledge had of late
Burn’d me with wish of knowing, if recall
Can I rightly what was my mental state,

As the thirst I experienc’d then; but call
To Virgil I dar’d not, so hurried he
Proceeded; nor could I myself forestall

My doubts; and thought and shyness thus held me.
The thirst inborn in man nothing can quell,
If not the water which the humble lass
Of Samaria ask’d from Jesus at the well,
Was burning me, as I hasten’d to pass
Through our crowded path behind my guide,
Sorry that rightly God would those harass.
And lo!, as Lucas writes that Christ would glide
Out of sepulchral depths, and would appear
To the twain pupils keeping up their stride,
A shade was manifest to us -in fear
Of treading the lying folks we kept low eye-,
Who our steps was tracing in the rear,
Unseen at first, until he spoke: “O my
Brothers, peace give you God!”. We turn’d at once,
And Virgil sent him back the friendly cry,
Then said to him: “Where blissful counsel runs
Peace may be granted thee by the true court
By whose eternal writ Heaven me shuns”.
“What!” said he -nor did we for this stop short-
“If you are spirits God on up won’t let,
Who thus far on his stairs gave you escort?”
And my teacher: “If thou look at what ‘s set
On his forehead by the angel’s hard signs,
Thou shalt well see to the chosen he ’ll get.
But, as she who unceasingly lives’ lines
Spins had not yet consumed all the flock
Cloto on the spindle for each man aligns,
His soul, sister to thine and mine, in lock
Was lest she come alone up to this site,
As in our way cannot of truth take stock.
Hence from the wide abyss of Hell was right
For me to be call’d out to lead him, till
Here and further, as far as lasts my might.
But tell me, if thou can, why all this hill
Just now shook so, and why all souls, deem I,
Shout’d from its top to the low drenched sill.”
So straight did Virgil’s question thread the eye
Of my will’s needle, my thirst was allayed
By the mere hope to drink the truthful why.
That soul began: “In each event obeyed
Are ever the prescrib’d order and mores
By the holy mountain’s ways; they can’t be strayed.
This place is free from any change of lores:
No other cause can move what happens here
If not what Heaven gets from its own shores.

That 's why no rain, nor hail or snow, must fear
-nor dew or hoarfrost- the slopes that rise
Above where the short stair's three grades appear:

Neither thick nor thin clouds trouble our skies,
No lightning nor rainbow, that yonder there
Ofttimes alter the landscape's usual plies:

Dry vapours cannot surge beyond that stair
Which I just nam'd, where standing on the breach
The deputy of Saint Peter wards this lair.

Aught can be shaken but the lower beach;
The winds that in earth's womb are hidden, though,
I don't know why, never this height could reach.

Here shakes but when a cleansed soul feel grow
Its might to rise or soar, Heavens to attain;
By their shaking the slopes greet our cry's blow.

The will to soar is the cleansing's proof plain,
And, feeling free to change soul's dwelling, takes
It by surprise, of joy giving it gain.

The soul's will sets indeed, earlier, high stakes
On soaring free; but is constrain'd to fill
Penance, as whim 'gainst will to sin her makes.

And I, who have been lying on this hill
More than five hundred years, just now have felt
Free yearning to soar up to better sill:

Therefore thou heard the quake; all the while yell'd
The devout souls through the mount in God's praise;
May they come soon to where bliss ever dwelt.”

Hearing that, as on man a drink more lays
Of joy the greater is the thirst, how much
His words availed me no word full says.

And my wise leader: “Now my wit can touch
What net entangles you, and its untting,
Why here shakes, why your common joy is such.

Now who thou wert be pleas'd to tell; why lying
Here for so many centuries hast been
Thy words should also, pray, be not denying.”

“When good Titus on God's aid supreme would lean
To take vengeance of wounds through which was spill'd
The blood sold out by Judas' kiss unclean,

I was” our pray was thus by him fulfill'd
“Down there on earth much renown'd with the name
Most worth of lasting honour, but unfill'd
By faith. So sweet my vocal song became,
From Toulouse Rome call'd me to Tiber's shores,
With deserv'd myrtle's crown to seal my fame.

Men still know me as Statius in their lores:
I sang of Thebes and of Achille's feats,
But fell to Death while doin' these latter chores.

Seed to my fire was the great flame that heats
With its embers divine a thousand like
Me, whom Poetry's breath uplifts or beats:

Eneides' flame I mean, which motherlike
Nourish'd me of its milk while writing verse:
A dram's worth without it won't be my spike.

And to stay one sun more bound here averse
Would I be not, delaying my ascent,
Could I my life to Virgil's times converse."

Hearing these words, his face then Virgil bent
To me, his mien with silence asking mine;
But not all can accomplish man's intent;

For laugh and tears so much are next in line
To the feelings from which either is born,
Less the more truthful's will can them confine.

By my face, as a wink, a smile was worn
Indeed; the shade fell silent then, and star'd
At eyes, where man's dissembling most is shorn;

And "Would thy labours make all good be shar'd
By thee;" said "why thy mien just now to show
A smile's fugitive flash to me has car'd?"

Now I am torn between two pulls: to throw
Pretence one urges me, th' other to stay
Silent; for which I sigh, not enough low

That Virgil doesn't hear, and "Fear thou nay
To speak;" bids me "but openly do tell
What with such feel he asked in his say."

After which "Thou perchance in wonder fell,"
Said I "o ancient soul, seeing me smile;
But I wish to give thee more wonder's spell.

This one lifting my sight with his wise wile
Is that same Virgil, from whom thy rhymes take
The strength to sing of men and Gods awhile.

If thou thought any other cause could make
Me smile, have it for false, and, pray, be sure
'Twere those words which in his presence thou spake."

To hug the feet of Virgil, with demure
Act was already kneeling Statius: "My
Brother, don't: thou a shade, I shade endure"
Said my lord. And he, rising: “Thus show I
The amount of love for thee which heats my mind,
To the point I forget our state: that’s why
I dealt with our vain substance as firm kind”.
Twenty-second Chant

Already behind us the angel stood
Who toward the sixth ring had us addressed,
Shaving one blow from my forehead, with good
Words saying bless’d those souls who felt the sting
Of justice, while their voice confirm’d his say
Beyond doubt, for “They thirst” as one would sing.

And I went lighter than on past trod way,
So that I follow’d without toil at all
The twain souls up the stair hurrying away,

When began Virgil: “In shar’d love did fall
Whoever had been lov’d with virtuous fire,
Provided outward shew’d its flaming call;

Therefore, since came the time when to the dire
Mansions of Limbo good Juvenal went
Thy love for me telling, it did require

Into as good disposition were I sent
Toward thee, such as never gripped me
For unseen man; so that short ’s the time lent

To tread with thee these stairs. But how could be
-Forgive if with assurance freely I speak,
And as a friend henceforth discourse with me-

That in thy soul so upright had found a weak
Spot avarice, in spite of wits so fine,
Of which with care to be fill’d thou didst seek?”

Statius’ lips curv’d at first in smiling line,
Then he answer’d: “Thy friendly words all shew
Of an endearing love the pleasing sign.

By their appearance truly not a few
Times things give us, being hidden their cause,
Reason to form opinions wholly untrue.

Thy question makes me aware thou think in those
Ranks I was put for avaricious bent
Held in my life until the last repose.

Learn now that avarice away was sent
From me too much, and this lack of restraint
Many thousands of months I did repent.

And were it not that I made then less faint
My will, when I intended thee to call
-Almost by anger against men constrain’d-:
"What is it that thou rule not, among all
Things, despicable greed of men for gold?"
The sad rounds I would turn in nether stall.

I was then made aware that wings too bold
Could grow my hands in spending, and repented
Of this as of the evils all of old.

How many shall resurge with badly dented
Mane, for ignorance precluding remorse
Of this sin ere the last breathing is vented!

And learn that any guilt contrary course
Taking to a certain sin, herein shall dry
Its verdant fronds with it in sad concourse;

Therefore, if among misers was sent I,
Not avarice to atone was it, but to
Bear pain for just the oppos'd I sinned by."

"Now when thou sang the cruel arms of two-
fold wretchedness Jocasta had in her fate,"
Said the poet of bucolic life "I, who

Look at what Clio with thee did there relate,
Cannot see that thou wert following yet
The faith; and without it good deeds don't rate.

If this is true, what sun or candles set
Alight the darkness so, that thou could sail
In the fisherman's wake, into his net?"

And he to him: " First had sent me thy tale
To Parnassus, that I drink in its cave,
And first thou of God's light let me avail.

Thou didst as man who, at night proceeding, gave
Lighting to those walking behind, with light
Carried at back, failing himself to save,

When thou said: 'A new age is dawning, bright
With justice born again and first man's law,
And new progenies shall from skies alight.'

Thanks to thee was I poet, for thee I saw
Christ's light; but so that thou can clearer see
What I am painting, with more hues I 'll draw.

The world already pregnant seem'd to be
With the new creed, sowed in patent writ
Of heralds to whom listen well could we;

And thy just mention'd words seemed to fit
The preaching of new preachers; for which I
Took to visit them often, and was lit.

Saint more and more they look'd to me; that 's why,
When Domitian had them pursued, their wails
Were not without my tears; and, till last'd my
Life on earth, I gave help to their travails;
And their straight mores I lik’d so much, I would
Despise all other sects as full of fails.

And ere my verses sang the Greeks who stood
On Thebes’ rivers’ shores, I was baptiz’d;
But I covertly ador’d, in fearful mood,
And for long time as pagan was appriz’d:
For this my lukewarm faith on the fourth ring
More than four hundred years I agoniz’d.

Thou then, having uncover’d the hidden thing
Of utmost good which I now name, disclose,
While we end our ascent, thy knowledge’s spring
Telling of our old Terence, and of those
Caecilius, Plautus, Varro thou well know:
Does Hell keep them? And where does them enclose?”

“They all, Persius and I with others dwell,”
Answer’d my leader “with the Greek who drank
The Muses’ milk more than ever befell,
In the first grade of the blind valley’s bank;
Oftentimes in our talks is nam’d the mount
Where abide those for our food we all thank.

Our ranks Antiphont and Agathon count,
Euripides, Simonis and a throng
Of other Greeks who drank the sacred fount.

Here of thy folks thou would see walk along
Antigone with Deiphiles; to those
Argias and sad Ismenes too belong.

Here she is seen who to shew Langias chose;
Here with the daughter of Tiresias ’s found
Thetis; Deidamias with her sister ’s close.”

The two poets went on without a sound:
Already, free from ascent and rock walls,
They were intent again to look around;

And, four of the day’s maids having serv’d calls,
The fifth was charged the Sun’s shaft to mind,
And rais’d its fiery tip to the stars’ halls,
When said my leader: “If I trust my mind,
I think we ’d better turn our right-hand back
To the rim, our wont way around to find.”

Thus then the past experience led our track,
And we went on our way with nary a doubt,
For that righteous soul’s assent made it lack.

They were going in front and I, without
Taking part, went behind with intent ear,
As poet, to what they discours’d about.
But their reasoning sweet was broken sheer
By a tree that on middle track there shows
Fruits which their pleasing smell makes tasty appear;
And, as fir tree on summit slender grows
From branch to branch, thus is this near the ground,
So that, I think, no way to climb allows.

On the side where our path was block'd, we found
From the high rock to fall a liquid stream,
That on the leaves spill'd its clear flow around.

The two poets went near the tree: a scream
Arose within the dripping fronds: “To feed
Thou shalt have dear on fruits that herein gleam”.

Then the voice said: “Mary paid deeper heed
To give the wedding honour and full shine
Than to her mouth, which now vouches for your need.

And in old Rome the women did not pine
For other drink than water; Daniel spurn'd
Food, and his knowledge grew more and more fine.

The first age, till was gold, with hunger turn'd
Acorns to tasty morsels; and each brook
Was nectar then to those who with thirst burn'd.

Honey and locusts, to be nourish'd, took
The Baptist, fasting in the barren land;
And for this, as is said in Gospels' book,

He 's full of glory, among the prophets grand.”
Twenty-third Chant

While into the green fronds I thrust my sight
Deep, as are wont to do those who go on
Wasting their life after small birds to smite,
My more than father went on saying: “Son,
Move on at last: of time the allotted space
More usefully it behoves we cut anon”.

I turned then, and turn’d as quick my pace,
After the spirits wise, who talk’d in guise
That I felt of my effort not a trace.

And lo!, among cries we heard a song to rise
“Domine, labia mea” with accents such
That with pleasure and pain those we ’d apprize.

“Of what, sweet father, are my ears in touch?”
Began I. “Shades, methinks” said he “who untie,
Going, the knot of debts incur’d too much”.

As pilgrims lost in thoughts are wont to spy,
Turning aside without slackening gait,
Unknown folks on their path whom they pass by,
Thus behind us, who to their speed were late,
Coming and overtaking look’d in awe
A silent crowd of devout souls in wait.

Sunken the eyes and dark, pale face and jaw,
They went, and gaunt so much, that from their bones
The skin took shape: this sorry sight we saw.

I doubt that Heresiton, in bygones,
Could be reduc’d to thinness as extreme,
When of his fasting more he fear’d the onus.

I said within myself: “Here goes, I deem,
The breed that lost Jerusalem, when Mary
Into her son put teeth; so gaunt they seem!”

Their orbits look’d as rings, but therein nary
A gem was seen: who in men’s face reads “man”
To see the “em” no strain found necessary.

Who could think that an apple’s odour can,
With that of water, thus command their greed,
Not knowing how these things up there so ran?

I was wondering yet what was the seed
Of such starving: of their gauntness, and skin
Flaking in scales, the cause I could not read,

From deep inside his skull when turned in
A shade his eyes to me, and steady stared;
Then loud shouted: “What grace is this I win?”
Never could have that face his person bared
To me; but in his voice at once was plain
What of the former mien his look had pared.

This spark lit up my knowledge yet again
Of such a changed semblance: in a flash
Forese's face I recogniz'd with pain.

“Pray, mind nothing about the arid rash
Discoloring my skin,” he implor'd “nor let
My wanting flesh thee in the least abash;

But tell me in truth of thee, and whom thou met
Who now as twin escort stand at thy side:
Don't leave me here for want of words upset!”

“Thy face, which dead I wept,” I did not bide
To answer “gives me now no lesser cause
To shed tears, seeing it all bone and hide.

But, for God's grace, what thus wears you disclose:
Don't make me speak while still I wonder: ill
Can man converse whose thoughts other cares close.”

And he replied: “From the everlasting will
Virtue is infus'd, in the water and tree
Here behind us, which makes me thinner still.

All the folks here who weeping go with me
Singing, follow'd their glutony in relish;
Through thirst and hunger saint again will be.

Of drinking and of eating lights our wish
The scent coming from yonder apple tree
And from the water sprays that on it swish.

And not one time alone our pain will be
Renew'd, in penance circling through this ring:
‘Pain’ I said; I ought rather to say ‘glee’,

‘Cause the same wish leads us to the crav'd thing
Which led Christ to say ‘Eli’ with glad mind,
When His blood freed us all from evil's sting.”

And I: “Forese, since when thou changed kind
Of world, coming to better life at last,
The mill of time five years not yet did grind.

Since thou the will to sin off did not cast
Ere the might to commit sin was all spent,
The right time to rejoin God being past,

How comes already to this ring thou went?
I thought I'd meet thee down, where time is paid
For time that pass'd in sin without repent.”

Now he replied: “Thus quick to rise lent aid,
So that the sweet martyrs' absinth I would
Drink, Nelly mine who bitter weeping laid.
With orations and devout sighs, she could
Draw me out of the slopes which rise postpone,
And from the lower circles free for good.

All the more in God’s love and favour shone
This sweet widow of mine, whom I lov’d much,
As in doing good deeds she ‘s more alone;

‘Cause Sardinia’s Barbagia shows not such
Immodesty in females, as the confine
In which I left her when with her lost touch.

What can I tell thee more, sweet brother mine?
A future time I contemplate already,
Not much from this removed down the line,

In which from pulpit comes a damning steady
For shameless Florence women who go about
To flaunt their breast with unclad tits too ready.

To tread their land modestly dress’d, I doubt
That any Moorish or barbarian lass
Needs reprimands: their mores are sound without.

But if certain of what shall come to pass
Speedily by God’s will could be the unchaste,
Their screams already would your ears harass.

Of the future if I get truthful taste,
Indeed, they will be sorry ere man’s hair veil
The cheeks of those now lull’d to sleep in haste.

Prithee, brother, of thee now speak the tale!
See how not I alone, but all my kind
Look at where thou break light with thy shade’s tail.”

For which I said to him: “To call to mind
Who thou to me and I to thee both were,
Still now in sorry thoughts our souls would bind.

Out from such life turn’d me that shade up there
In front of me, two days ago, when round
To ye was shewn its sister”, in the air

Pointing at Sun. “He led me safe and sound
Through the deep night of the true dead, with this
True flesh which follow’d him faithfully around.

Thence his attentions drew me out; and his
Guidance led me up and around this mount
Which straightens you whom the world made amiss.

On his company, he says, no longer count
Shall I when with Beatrice I ’ll be rejoin’d:
Then I ’ll remain without his wisdom’s fount.

Virgil is this who tells as much”and point
Did I to him; “and the other shade is he
For whom just now shook all the slopes, to anoint
The fact that in your realm he ceas'd to be.”
Twenty-fourth Chant

...is say did not slow down his pace, nor did
His stride retard his speech; nay, fast
We went talking, as ship from dead calm rid;
And the shades, twice with dead look overcast,
From within their deep sockets turn’d their eyes
At my live body, in wonderment aghast.
And I, following up my words “He tries”
Said “perchance to go up with gait more slow
Than he would keep, for a reason that lies
With others. But tell me, if thou yet know,
Where is Piccarda; and tell if I can see
Noteworthy shade, of these who wonder show.”
“Beauty and goodness in her vied; which could be
Greater, I cannot say; with well-earn’d crown
Happy in highest Olympus now gleams she.”
Thus spake at first, and then: “So pared down
Is our semblance for the fasting, that
It ’s not wrong to refresh, naming, renown.
This one whom now I point my finger at
From Lucca is, Bonagiunta; and aught away
That face more than the others shorn of fat
Had in his arms the Holy Church; men say
Him ’from Tours’; Bolsena’s eels with fast,
And wine in which he cured them, must pay.”
In naming many another shade he pass’d
Some time; and all seem’d pleas’d to be so nam’d,
Since by this none I saw to be harass’d.
By vain gnashing of teeth tried to make tam’d
Their hunger Ubaldino of Pila, and that
Bonifazio of the crook for pasture fam’d.
I saw the lord Marchese, who while sat
In Forlì could assuage his thirst with less
Burning, but never had large enough vat.
But as the man who chooses fain to address
One more than others, I address’d the shade
From Lucca, who for news of me did press.
He whisper’d; and “Gentucca” then I made
Out of the low sound from his mouth, where more
He felt the sting of pain justice there bade.
“O soul” said I “who so eagerly pore
Over my words, let me clearly intend thine,
And thee and me with thy saying restore.”
“Woman is born, not yet hiding her fine
Hair” began he “who shall give thee good cause
To like, despite all smear, that town of mine.

Thou shall depart with this forecast; of those
Things I mutter’d if thou took false advice,
Later the real outcome will tell true prose.

But declare whether I see him who nice
New verse brought forth, beginning in his rhyme
‘Women whose wits the thoughts of love entice’.

And I to him: “I am such, that at time
When love tells, I but listen, and in those
Ways it dictates inside, my verse make chime”.

“Brother, now I perceive” said he “the cause
That held myself, Guittone and James this side
From the sweet novel style that from you arose!

Clearly I see how your pens so strictly abide
By what love is dictating: ours for sure
Cannot of this endeavour claim the pride;

And should man deeper push his gaze, for lure
To sift one from the other style, he’d see
No more”; and went, sat’d, to his penance’s cure.

As the cranes who spend winter beyond sea
Sometimes in swarms fly over, then in line
Speed up, from our cold climate to flee,

Thus all the folks there gathering left mine
Company and hurried up, turning their gaze;
Of will and leanness their light steps bore sign.

And as a man for tiredness would laze
Letting his mates go on, and slow his gait
Until his breathing pants no more, and stays,

Thus to the speeding holy crowd was late
Forese, and more sedately with me
Going, ask’d: “When shall thy sight again me sate?”

“How much” I answer’d “I have left to be
Alive, I cannot know; but not as fast
I’ll be back, that my will faster won’t flee

To these shores; for the place where I was cast
To live, from day to day divests all good,
And without ruinous end too long won’t last.”

“Now go” he said; “cause he who more blame should
Carry, by me is seen dragg’d by a mule’s tail
To the abyss where no sin be cancel’d could.

The beast faster and faster treads its trail,
With growing fury, till it’ll trash the lout,
And leave in a vile heap body and entrail.
Not for long time those wheels shall spin about,  
And to the sky he rais'd his eyes "that clear  
Shall be what of my words I leave without,  

For though thou stay, I must go; time is dear  
In this abode of mine: too much I lose  
Keeping the slower speed with which thou steer."

As rider in a host sometimes, with loose  
Reins, at a gallop speeds forward, 'cause he  
To reap the honour of first clash would choose,  

So he trespass'd with wider strides; and me  
Left behind on my way, with my two mates  
Great masters fated in the world to be.

And when he was almost beyond the gates  
Of my eyes, so that hardly could I sight  
Him, as in mind his words raised dim waits,

Appear'd in front the fruited branches and bright  
Of a new tree not very far to stand,  
Since, turning, I just then could spot its site.

I saw folks under it raise arm and hand,  
Shouting I don't know what, toward the fronds,  
Like inept greedy kids in screaming band,

When they implore someone; and he responds  
Not, but to make their greed more and more keen,  
The desir'd object raises, nor absconds.

Come then to senses, to depart were seen;  
And soon we stood under the great tree's shade,  
Where untold tears and prays in vain have been.

"You 'll go beyond, nor dare come nearer;" bade  
A voice: "high up a plant by Eve was bit,  
And a sprout from its trunk grew in this glade."

Who was thus speaking could not tell our wit;  
For which Virgil and I, with Statius, crept  
Between the slope and the plant, beyond it.

“Remember” said the voice “the accursed sept  
Of the cloud's sons, who having drunk to excess  
Against Theseus with twofold nature leapt;

And remember the Jews whose drunkenness  
Made Gedeon refuse their fealty pledges,  
When he stormed downhill Madian fortress."

Thus sidling close to one of the two edges  
We went beyond, listening to the sins  
Of gluttony, which bore but meager hedges.

A contemplating mood us all then wins,  
As on the wider lonely road we walk  
A thousand steps, and each his own thoughts spins.
What fancy keeps you three going without talk?
Suddenly sounds; I startle, as a beast
Frighten'd and new at a sharp noise will balk.

I rais'd my head to see who 'd talk'd; and least,
To what I saw, would be the furnace-hot
Red shine of glass or steel from fire releas'd,

And such a shining being was saying: "Not
Farther should ye turn up, if your desires
Prompt to mount on; here goes in peace our lot".

My sight was dazzled by his look of fires;
So that I, as a man takes ears for guide,
Turn'd behind my beloved learned sires.

And as, heralds of dawning light, there ride
May's breezes all suffus'd with fragrant scent
Taken from herbs and flowers on each side;

Thus felt I then a wind that sweetly went
About my head, and the feather I felt
Which lent ambrosia's smell to th' air it sent.

And I heard: "Blessed those in whose breast dwelt
So much of grace, that love of taste did raise
In them desire which never too big swell'd,

Always keeping in check all hunger base!"
Twenty-fifth Chant

The time was such as to afford no delay
In ascending; Taurus, indeed, had taken
The sun's place at meridian, and night's way

To Scorpio went: thus, as man overtaken
By pressing need cares not what is around,
But pursues his progress with will unshaken,

In the same way we went inside the bound
Of narrow passage, climbing up the stair
Where two, for straitness, take staggered ground.

And as the storkling fears to leave its lair
Though willing to take flight, and beats its wings
But soon lowers them down, bereft of dare,

Thus of my will to ask felt I the stings
Light up and wane, and hover'd on the brink
Of the act of man preparing to say things.

Of my need the good father cared to think
In spite of his fast pace; in fact, he bade:
"Thy arrow's drawn: release the taut bow's link!"

Then I open'd my mouth assur'd, and said:
"How can become thinner, where is no need
To be nourish'd, any insubstantial shade?"

"Meleager's fate had thou brought to thy heed,
How he was worn as the firebrand was spent,
Not so sour would all this have tasted, indeed;"

Said he, "and thinking how faithfully went
In thy mirror the image after each move,
Most easily would be the riddle bent.

But, so that thou be assuag'd in the truth's trove,
Here is good Statius; on him I call, and pray,
That of thy sores the sting he may remove."

"If in thy sight the eternal truth I say,"
Answer'd Statius "such boldness may be excus'd
For I cannot to thy request bid nay."

Then to me: "The 'how' which keeps thy mind confus'd,
Son, shall receive enlightenment in thy thought,
If by thee be with care my words perus'd.

A perfect blood, which by no means is sought
To be drunk by the thirsty veins, by right
Saved, as unbit food from desk is brought,
Takes from the heart for all man’s limbs the might
To give shape, as the other blood gives heat,
Coursing the veins, to keep limbs’ life alight.

Aught more matur’d, it goes down where it ‘s neat
Not to dwell on, and hence at last will seep
On other’s blood, in nature’s proper seat.

Thus both of them are joined in the deep,
One subjected, and one with upper hand,
After the perfect place where ‘s held its keep.

This last begins, conjoined once, to mand,
First by curdling, then enlivening that
Which by its inborn power it made stand.

To a live soul the active virtue ‘s aiming at,
Like a plant’s, but from this different by
Being under way, while it finally ‘s set;

Motion and sense in it are made to lie
Then, as a marine mushroom’s; later still
The virtue makes its organs grow and tie.

Now the virtue ‘s deployed; now it will
Unfurl the might that comes from parent’s heart,
By nature’s ways which all man’s members fill.

But how a child from many a beast-like part
Can rise, thou cannot see yet: on this point
Not a few wiser men took errant start,

When in their doctrine they assum’d disjoint
From the soul man’s capacity to intend,
‘Cause for it they saw not organ to appoint.

Open thy breast to the true words I send:
And learn that, soon as did the foetus’ brain
In the body complete its growing trend,

The Prime Mover happily then shall deign,
Turning to such a nature’s work of art,
To blow in it new soul, replete with gain

Of virtue, which will draw any active part
Therein found to its substance, and in one
Living and sentient soul make conscience start.

And so that less at words thy marvel run,
Consider how, joined to vine’s own sap,
Becomes wine the refulgent heat of sun.

When Lachesis no more flax in her lap
Has to spin, and the soul from flesh unbinds,
Divine and human traits from it don't flap;
Though powerless become all other kinds,
Memory, wit and will in act are made
Still keener than they were in live men's minds.

Without pause, wonderfully to Hade
The soul then falls, on one of either shore;
Here to each is decreed its proper glade.

As soon as it's surrounded by a core
Of nearing space, its forming virtues beam
Around, as in live members if not more;

And as the air, when filled with rain's steam,
From foreign rays reflected in its bounds
Takes on of multicolour'd hues a stream,

Thus the ether nearby such shape expounds
As, by the soul virtually inspir'd, in it
Is seal'd, bearing the imprint of earthen grounds;

And in the way the light won't ever quit,
However it changes place, the burning flame,
That this new form stay with the soul is fit.

Since from the soul it takes its semblance, name
Of shade is given; in it are then set
All senses up to sight, lest it be lame.

From this we speak, from this we laugh or fret,
From this we can send forth our tears and sighs,
Which up this slope upon thy ears were let.

According to the afflictions of our ties
And desires, our shades their figure take;
And with this fact thy unlit reason vies."

To where the souls their final penance make
We had already come and, to the right
Turned, of other things took heed and spake.

Here the slope's shooting out hot flames and bright,
But the rim upward blows a wind so strong
That the fire it reflects back in wild fight;

So that we were obliged to walk along
The open side, one by one, I the while fearing
Here the fire, there the fall if stepping wrong.

My leader said: "To avoid falling or searing
Is required with the eyes to take great care,
'Cause little would suffice to loose one's steering".
“Summae Deus clementiae” in the flare
Of white-hot flames I heard the song arise,
Which made me no less keen to turn my stare;

Souls did I in the fire thus recognize
Walking, and I look’d at them now, and again
Look’d at my steps, to twain attention wise.

Then “Virum non cognosco” went a strain
Of new high-pitched song, after old’s end:
And later they began in lower vein.

When finish’d, they would shout: “Away did send
Diana, from the wild woods where she dwelt on,
Helices who to Venus’ sting would bend”.

Then they resum’d their song; again anon
They would shout of the chaste women and men
Who of virtue and wedding fain the yoke took on.

And this singing, methinks, lasts in their den
All the while they are singed by the hot flame;
With this remedy and food their sores will then,

As it behoves, be cured after God’s aim.
While thus along the rim in single file
We went, and oftentimes my master wise
Said: “Take care” to keep awake my wile,
The sun was hitting my right side; its rise
Long past, its rays were changing in the west,
From azure hue to white, all the sky’s guise;
And my shadow made redder than the rest
The flames it fell upon; and on this small
Clue I saw many shades their wits to test.

This was the cause that started, soon, them all
To speak of me, in wonder saying: “That
Body of his we would not fictitious call!”
Then some of them, as far as they could, at
My place came, all the while caring lest out
They stray, to where no burning torment sat.

“O thou who go, not for laziness’ bout,
But in deference, I deem, behind those two,
Tell me, whom thirst and fire rage all about!
Nor I alone thy answer need: these too
Mates of mine thirst for it much more than could
Indians or Ethiopians for cold drinks do.

Tell us how comes that, as a wall, withstood
Thy body the sun’s rays, as though the net
Of death thou had not yet enter’d for good.”
Thus spake one of those shades; and I was set
To show myself, had I not been delay’d
By novel things that before me were let;
‘Cause amid the sear’d way toward us stray’d
New folks, toward the first walking, and I,
Suspended, all attention to them paid.

There I see from both sides come hurrying by
Each shade, and with each other trade a kiss
Without rest, such brief joy content to try:
Thus, within their brown host, that ant with this
Shall smell their mutual scent, to spy, I deem,
Where lies best fate, where not to get amiss.

As soon as to part company they seem,
Ere they take the first step away from there,
At the top of their voice they strive to scream:
“Gomorrha and Sodom!” the new folks; and “Stare!”
The first, “Pasiphae inside the wooden cow
Entices the young bull its lust to bare!”.
Then, as cranes fly away—some seeking how
To eschew the sun, some how to avoid the freeze—
To Riphean mounts or sandy lands, so now

Those folks go thither, hither proceed these;
And all return in tears to their first song
And to the cries that most their pain appease;

And, as before, near me gathers the throng
From which had come the prays to speak, intent,
By their semblance, to listen all along.

I, who had seen two times to what content
Turned their heed, began: “O souls secure
To a state of peace, at last, of being sent,

My limbs neither unripe down, nor mature
Left I; nay, I am here whole, with their rind
And flesh and blood and all live joints for sure.

Through here upward I go lest I stay blind:
Woman is there high up who buys me grace
To carry to your world my mortal kind.

But, would your greater wish find soon solace,
So that your den become that heaven where
Love reigns and which is spread to widest space,

Tell me, that I to write of it take care,
Who are ye, and what folks are in that throng
Which goes behind your backs to farther lair.”

Not otherwise rough mountain men, along
The city streets proceeding, troubled mien
Turn in surprise to things that there belong,

Than did each shade, such wonder being seen
On their countenance; but as it had wand’ed,
As soon happens in hearts above the mean,

“O blissful thou, who our lands attain’d
And there,” began he who had ask’d before,
“To die a better death, experience gain’d!

The folks who went away that offence bore
For which in his triumph the scornful name
Caesar endur’d of ‘queen’in common lore:

For this away with cries of ‘Sodom’ came
Their crowd, themselves reproaching; to the blast
Of flames they add, this way, their burning shame.

Into two-sexed sin our souls were cast;
But since we did not keep the human law,
As beasts following lust in our life past,

For our shame she is nam’d whom the world saw
Make herself beast inside the bestial planks,
As, when we part’d, thou heard in shouting raw.
But for our acts and sins thou owe me thanks:
"Cause, if perchance thou ask our names to know,
Short 's the time, nor know I all in our ranks.

Well can I for myself thy wish make low:
Guido am I Guinizelli; and I 'm already
In penance, for repenting ere death's blow."

As in Lycurgus' sadness were shewn ready
Two sons to meet their mother, so was I
Mov'd, but instead remained fast and steady,

When I heard thus to name his person my
Father, nay, parent of those better yet
Whom sweet, fair rhymes of love were written by;

And without word or hearing was I let
To go for a long space looking at him,
Nor, for the fire, dar'd I nearer to get.

When of gazing his looks was sat'd my whim,
I offer'd to serve him for all I could,
Making words with my oath trustworthy and trim.

And he replied: "Thou leave in me such good
Imprint, and clear as much, for what I hear,
Not even Lethe erase or dim it would.

But if thy latest words were truthful, clear
Make to me for what cause thy actions shew,
In words and looking, thou hast me so dear."

To which: "I 'm mov'd by the sweet words that flew
From your pen, which shall make lovely yet
Our meetings, till will last a style so new".

"O brother mine" said he “see this I set
Apart by pointing;” and he nodd'd to one,
"No better smith of our tongue was met.

Verses of love and novels' prose have run
From him better than all; and let the fools
Say from Limoges worthier things were spun:

In hearsay more than truth they find their schools,
And thus they gain their firm beliefs ere still
Than they avail of art's, or reason's, tools.

Thus of Guittone said the ancients -till
The force of truth won him in the folks' mind-
As long as ground for him common cry's mill.

Now if thou hast so ample grant to find
The way to enter that high cloister where
Christ is the abbot of the saintly kind,

Say for me a 'Holy Father' in His lair,
As far as we have need in this our land,
Where no longer we can in your sins share."
Then, to leave space, methinks, therein to stand
To another shade nearby, he disappear'd
In the flames, as fish sink to bottom; and

Pushing myself forward a little, I near'd
The pointed at spirit, and “My wish” said
“Graciously shall welcome thy name, when clear’d.”

And thus began with free good will the shade:
“So much endears my soul thy corteous pray,
That can not, nor wish I- be covert made

My name. I am Arnauld, who weep and say
Our song; thoughtful I see the madness past,
And look with gladness to the joyous day

Nearing. Now I appeal the worth that cast
Thee on the way to the summit of stairs:
Memory of these my pains in thee make last!”

Then in the purging fire were hid his cares.
Twenty-seventh Chant

As when the Sun its morning rays darts by
Where its Creator shed His blood, and flows
The Iber under Libra hovering high,

While Ganges’ waves are scorched by the glow’s
High noon, such is day’s time; the light gets dim,
When his glad look to us God’s angel shows.

Outside the flame he stood, straddling the rim,
And sang “Bless’d those pure in the heart”; the voice
Lively much more than ours sounded in him.

Then “Beyond to proceed you have no choice,
Bless’d souls, if first this fire shall not have bit:
Get in, and in the yonder song rejoice”

Said he as near to him we came; my wit
Became such, when the words I had intended,
As that of man who’s put into death’s pit.

Over my joined hands I then extended
My head, looking at flames and in fierce thought
Of human flesh seen in the past incended.

My good escorts turned to me, and sought
Virgil to exhort me saying: “Son of mine,
Here can be torment, but death is not wrought.

Recall, recall! If ever I led thine
Journey, making thee safe on Gerion’s wing,
What less shall I do now, nearer God’s shine?

Be assur’d that if into this fire’s hot sting
Thou should remain a thousand years, not one
Of thy hairs from thy scalp could the flames wring.

And should thou think perchance misleading run
My words, go forward: thine own hands will gain
Faith, if clothes’ hem to put to fire won’t shun.

Divest at last, divest all fearful stain:
Turn this way now; come on, go in assured!”
But still I stood, against my conscience’s strain.

When he saw me in standing firm endured,
Troubled somewhat he said: “My son, now see:
This fire from Beatrice’s sight keeps thee immured”.

As at the name of Thisbe, although was he
Near death, Pyramus’ eyes open’d and star’d
At her, when redden’d the mulberry tree,

Thus, my hard will become pliant, I dar’d
Turn again to my lord, hearing the name
For which my dearest recollections car’d.
At this he shook his head and said: “How came?
Don't we wish keep this side?”, then smil'd, as smiles
He who with apples' gift makes a child tame.

Then in the fire preceded me; the fire's
Middle I took, and Statius went the last,
Who earlier had part'd us for not few miles.

As soon inside, I 'd rather have been cast
Into incandescent glass to cool, so strong
Is of the scorching heat the unbounded blast.

To comfort me, sweet Virgil goes among
The flames speaking of Beatrice all the while:
“I see her eyes already, if I 'm not wrong”.

A voice, guiding us on, seems to beguile,
Singing, beyond; and out of fire at last
Intent to it, where the stair mounts, we file.

“Come, ye bless'd by my Father” sounded past
A light that shone just there, so strong and bright
That I avert'd my sight, by far surpass'd.

“The sun goes down” the voice then said “and night
Is falling: don't stop here, but mind your pace,
While the west is not yet bereft of light”.

The way inside the rock went straight apace
Up, pointing to the east, so that I cut
In front of me sun's rays from low in space.

I and my sages had made experience but
Of a few grades, when for the waning shade
We felt the day, behind, by sunset shut.

And ere in all its immense parts would fade
Into darkness the horizon's whole outlook,
And night its hold over all things had laid,

Each one of us as bed a grade then took;
The mount's nature, indeed, out of us all
The might and pleasure still to ascend off shook.

As ruminating goats rest in the stall
Docile, whereas daring and fast they were
On top of hills ere heeding their meal's call,

Silent in shade, while sunrays heat the air,
Watched on by their shepherd, who on his crook
Leans and so lean'd attends to each their care;

And as the herdsman, who his dwelling took
Out of his home, near his herd lies quiet,
Watching lest beasts waste it; such was the look

Of all the three of us then in that site,
I as a goat, and as shepherds the twain,
Swathed on either side by the rock's height.
Little could there be seen of skies; but plain,  
In that small space that I could see, stars were  
Shining brighter than wont, and with size gain.  

Thus meditating and still looking there,  
Sleep caught me; fateful sleep that often lays,  
Ere the events happen, news of future bare.  

In the hour when first darted with her rays  
Into the mount from east Venus, who seems  
To burn from fire of love in all her days,  

A winsome lass and young came in my dreams  
Whom I saw going through a glade; she went  
Picking buds, and of songs let out sweet streams:  

“Let know those who to learn my name are bent  
That I ’m Leah; my fair hands I move around,  
To make a garland of these buds intent,  

Attiring me the fairer to be found  
In my own eyes; but Rachel, sister mine,  
All day sits, by her mirror charm’d and bound.  

To gaze at her fair eyes’ reflected shine  
She’s eager as to adorn I with my hands:  
As me to do, to see fulfils her fine.”  

And already for dawn’s resplendent bands,  
Which comfort all the more pilgrims on way  
As, returning, they come nearer their lands,  

The darkness from all sides was rout’d by day,  
And all my sleep with it; so that I rose,  
Seeing the great wise men risen to stay.  

“That sweet fruit which the mortals without pause  
Along so many a branch seek, will today  
Of thy hungers’ appeasement be the cause.”  

These words would at that point good Virgil say  
Toward me; and no gift by me receiv’d  
Was ever with such joy in any day.  

So great will upon will then I conceiv’d  
To go up, that at each step on my way  
I felt new feathers to my flight were weav’d.  

As all the stair, run up, under us lay,  
And we were poised on the highest grade, my sire  
In me plant’d of his eyes the earnest ray,  

And said: “The eternal and the transient fire  
Thou saw, my son; and now thou came to where  
My might to lead thee farther will expire.  

I led thee here with my wit and my care;  
At last thy will thou should take as thy guide:  
Out thou art of the steep straits and unfair.
Look at the sun which shines ahead; thy side
Is flank'd by grass, flowers and bushes, see,
This land all by itself bears high and wide:

Until the fairest eyes shall come in glee
Whose tears made me go to thy succour, here
Thou can stroll, or among them sitting be.

Thou shalt not wait my nod, nor my word hear
Anymore: sound and straight and free's thy wit,
And wrong would be not to let it thee steer:

To crown and mitre thee over thee now 's fit."
Twenty-eighth Chant

Full of desire to look and make foray
In the divine thick wood that such life bore,
And to my eyes made mild the light of day,

Without further ado I left the shore,
Taking my way ever so slowly amid
The land that on all sides sent fragrance fore.

A breeze was sweetly blowing, but it did
Not show the slightest gust: it hit my face
With force not greater than mild wind would bid;

For which all fronds, aquiver, bent in space
Obediently toward the horizon’s side
Where the holy mountain’s shade throws its first trace;

Nor did for this so far on the breeze ride
As to impede the small birds on each branch’s end
To exert themselves in all their arts with pride;

Nay, with full happiness their songs portend
The dawning hours seeping throughout the fronds,
Which, rustling, with the birds’ their own notes send;

In a like way from tree to tree responds
The pine grove on the Classis shore, when out
Of his cave Aeolus frees Sirocco’s bonds.

My steps, in such a slow strolling about,
Had brought me inside the ancient wood so far,
The way in lay unseen on the without;

And lo!, further progress a stream would bar,
Which to the left with its small wavelets bent
The grass that grac’d its bank with many a star

Of blooms. All cleanest rills that ever went
Flowing, would seem admix’d with soiled silt
Compar’d with that, which hid naught its content,

Although it flows, with dark as dark hues fill’d,
Under perpetual shadows, which will let
Sun’s or Moon’s rays on it not ever tilt.

My feet arrested I, and eyes I set
Beyond the rill, to gaze at all that great
Variety of fresh greens there to be met;

And therein it appears -a wondrous bait
That by its sudden coming into view
Diverts all other thought from the mind’s gate-

A lonely wench, who walks amidst the dew
Singing and choosing bloom from bloom, of those
Which in all hues the glades on her path strew.
"Beautiful wench, who to be warmed chose
By love's rays, if I can believe the mien
Which 's wont to express what in the heart arose,

Prithee, deign to come forward to be seen"
Said I "near to this rill, so that I can
Better intend what thy song's words have been.

Thou remind me of how, ere put in ban
From her mother and spring, was Proserpine,
And of the place where her sad fate began."

As their steps with tight-joined feet entwine,
Planting them firmly on ground, women in dance,
That heel and toe hardly overstep in line,

Not otherwise turned from her fair stance
On red and yellow blooms the wench, in look
As virgin who demurely looks askance;

And, fulfilling my vows, further steps took
Toward me, nearing so that her sweet sound
Came to me, and of its sense I partook.

As soon as she was where the grass-strewn ground
Along the river by the waves was wet,
Such gift her raised eyes were, as to astound:

I don't think such a shining light was let
From under Venus' lashes, when her son
Pierced her, against habits long time set.

She was smiling, standing erect there on
The river's bank, entwining colour'd reeds
Which that high land, unseeded, grow upon.

Three steps apart the river kept us needs;
But Hellespont, where Xerxes pass'd the sea
-Still restraint to the pride which man's might feeds-,

Never gave to Leander greater plea
For hate, when storming between parted shores,
Than those waves, 'cause they didn't yield to me.

"You seem green to this place and to its mores,
And perchance you 're amaz'd because I smile
In this spot mark'd as nest to human lores,"

Began the wench "and doubts, methinks, ye rile;
But the psalm 'Delectasti' will bring light
That can dissolve the mist which clouds your wile.

And thou who are in front, and pray'd me tight,
Tell what else thou desire to hear; for I
Came ready, and pledge to answer till is right."

"The water, and the forest sound, in my
Mind" said I then "are battling new belief
In things I heard contrariwise to lie."
And she replied: “I’ll tell how in this fief
Proceeds what holds thee in wonder; thus I’ll clear
The mists that to thy wits are giving grief.

The highest good, who alone to himself is dear,
Made man fit to pursue the good, and gave
Him, as token of peace eternal, near

The sky this place; but was man’s fault to have
Stay’d here so shortly, and all his life, in dearth
Of smile and play, with tears and cares to pave.

In order that the vapours of the earth
And of water, which always after heat
Proceed, to various troubles giving birth,

Should not to man make war, this mount all neat
From them, by way of its exhalted height,
Is, from the gate where thou inside set feet.

Now, since all round the ethers circulate
With the first heaven’s vault, unless, their way
Being in some parts obstructed, they abate,

On this top, which immersed ever lay
In the free-flowing ether, steady is felt
This wind, as the thick wood’s rustling will say.

As in each plant thus shaken there has dwelt
Its virtue, of it pregnant becomes the air,
And this, turning around, spreads those expell’d

Virtues on lower grounds; and when and where
These are shewn fit for fate and nature, they
Bear from this cause the common trees and rare.

It should not to be marvel’d at, I say,
Having heard this, if plants are seen to sprout
On earth without visible seed, and stay.

And thou should learn that is full all about
Of ev’ry seed this holy land where we
Are, and of fruits that men must make without.

From no source comes the water which thou see,
Nor from vapour by frost converted, whence
Rivers are found in flood or draught to be;

Nay, it comes from a fount exempt of chance,
That as much from God’s will takes, as is toss’d
By open issues which twain streams enhance.

On this side it goes down with virtue most
Apt to erase from the mind memory of sin;
On the other are restor’d all good deeds lost.

Hence Lethe, thence Eunoe is nam’d; and in
Souls it works naught, unless it’s tast’d before
From one and the other side; its flavours win
By far all others by which man sets store.
And though perchance thy thirst may now be sat’d
Even without my telling thee some more,

By grace further corollary 'll be wait’d
On thee; nor will, methinks, my say less dear
Be, if beyond my promise is inflat’d.

In ancient times perhaps the poets near
Parnassus dreamed of this place, when they
Of golden age sang many a happy year.

Here man's root was innocent, and here lay
Eternal spring with ev'ry fruit; here 's seen
To lie the nectar about which all say.”

I turned then to Statius and my dean
Behind me, and I saw that with a smile
They had listen'd to what lastly had been
Said; but again the wench would me beguile.
Singing as sings a woman deep in love,
She went on without pause after her talk:
“Bless’d all whose sins pardon is laid above!”

And, as the nymphs who alone used to walk
Through the wilderness’ shades, some longing for
The Sun’s rays, some the light tending to balk,

Thus did she move her pace along the shore
Against the river’s flow; and I behind,
Her brief step matching with step long not more.

Not hundred paces mine with hers did wind
Ere the two banks as one turned aside,
So that eastward our path would hence we find;

Nor was that way progressed much our stride,
When she said: “Brother, now listen and look”,
All of her person turning to my side.

And lo!, a flash all of a sudden took
The forest from all parts, so intense that I
Thought with lightning perchance the ether shook.

But, since lightnings at once vanish from sky
And this lastingly shone more and more bright,
I wonder’d: “What’s this new thing flashing by?”

And a sweet melody went with the light
Through the resplendent air; for which fair zeal
Made me put blame on Eve’s recklessness’ flight:

Indeed, when earth and heavens were all feal,
She, lone female just then created, none
Submission to stay under veil did feel;

Whereas, had she the ask’d obeisance done,
I could have tasted those untold delights
For longer time: no ban would them postpone.

As I went through those first-perceived sights
And sounds of bliss eternal, quite suspended
And wishing for still more joyful insights,

In front of us the air, lo! was incended,
Under green boughs, not unlike a red fire;
And the sweet sound as song was now intended.

O sacred Virgins, if ever I dire
Hunger or cold, or vigils, for you bore,
With good cause I ask you succour my lyre.

Now it behoves Helicon springs flow more,
And Urania, with Muses all, lend me
Rhymes to express of hard things the hidden core.
Aught farther, seven golden shapes of tree
Seemed to rise, their look alter’d by wide
Stretch of space from the spot where stood now we;

But when nearer to them brought me my stride,
So that the overall look to sense deceiving
Did not for distance the actual nature hide,

The virtue that to reason lends perceiving
Taught me how candelabra they had been,
And how “Osanna” the choir’s voice was heaving.

From its top the fair things blazed, with sheen
Much clearer than the moon’s from serene sky
In the mid of her month at midnight ‘s seen.

To my lord in amazement turn’d then I,
And Virgil answer’d with a look not less
Charged with wonder, this new sight born by.

Then I brought back my gaze to the progress
Of those tall things, which toward us so slow
Were coming, more a bride-to-be would press.

The woman chided me: “Why such love show
For the look of the lively flaming lights,
Neglecting what behind them comes, more low?”

Folks saw I then, following those fair sights
As their leaders, all clad in white so pure,
That here on earth never were seen such whites.

The water shone on my left side, for sure
Reflecting my left part so clear, that more
Couldn’t I think mirrors could sight allure.

When such a spot I reached on my shore
That but the width of stream made me sever’d
From them, for better sight to pause I bore,

And I saw the bright flames proceed: each smear’d
Behind it the clear air with colour’d wake,
And as drawn brush in such an act appear’d;

So that all along there the air would take
On seven smears of colours, wholly like
Those Diana’s belt and rainbow on earth make.

These standards in the rear more than could strike
My sight extended; and methinks the extreme
Streaks were apart what ten full steps would hike.

Under fair sky of which I sing the gleam
By two twentyfour seniors went along:
Fleur-de-lis crowns enhanc’d their high esteem.

All were chanting: “O blessed thou among
Adam’s daughters, and blessed be by right
Thy fairest graces for all aeons long!”
When the buds and all more fresh green in sight
On the opposite stream's bank in front of me
No longer were seen crowded by such height,
As light to light in heavens could thou see
Succeed, four beasts went next with mighty stride,
Crown'd each by fronds as from a verdant tree.
All with six well-plum'd wings adorn'd each side,
And full of eyes the feathers were; such would
Look Argo's eyes, should he life's realm abide.
No further rhymes to paint their shape I should
Spend, reader mine: more pressing needs impel
Me, who therefore on this dwell hardly could;
But read Ezekiel's book, whose pages tell
How he saw them coming from the cold part
Of sky, with wind and cloud and fire as well;
And as thou shalt find them describ'd with art
In his words, so they were; but feathers' look
John's pages more exactly truly impart.
A cart the space within those four beasts took,
On two wheels standing, apt for triumphal train,
Drawn by a griffin through neck-harness'd hook.
Where the seven bright traces flow'd, the twain
Wings were raised, straddling the middle one,
To neither of the other six, though, giving pain.
So high they rose, eyes to tips could not run;
The limbs were gold as far as bird-looks went,
And the rest white with some vermillion spun.
Let alone that in Rome no cart was lent
As beautiful to Scipio or leader rash,
But the Sun's own compar'd to this seem'd spent;
The Sun's cart which, astray led, became ash,
After the devout prays of all mankind,
When -justly in arcane ways- Jove made it crash.
Near the right wheel three girls with single mind
Came dancing on: the first so redly shone
That within flames one could her hardly find;
The second was as if her flesh and bone
Green as of purest emerald were wrought;
The third from virgin snow could have told none;
And aught from the white lass, from the red aught
They seemed led; and from the latter's song
The other two fast or slow dancing sought.
Near the left wheel four women cheer'd along,
Cloth'd in purple, following walk and dress
Of one whose sight for triple eye was strong.
After all the preceding knot would press
Two old men, though unlike each other clad
Both noble in their act, steady not less.

The look of one of them the appearance had
Of a fellow of Hippocrates supreme,
Whose gifts to its dearest creatures Nature spread;

The other, steeped in the opposing theme,
Shewed a sword so sharp and shiny, I
Felt no small dread though on far side of stream.

Humbly attired four more saw I come by,
And, last of all behind, a lone old man
Who walked dreaming, with face keen and wry.

Those seven's dress as the first cohort's ran;
But round their heads was thrown no lilies' thread
In shape of garlands as for that first clan,

Nay, they were crown'd with roses and more red
Flowers, so that from not great distance could
Man think their brows a blazing fire to shed.

And when the cart in front of me stand would,
A thunderclap was heard; I was aware
Those worthy folks proceed no longer should,

But had to stop, with their first colours, there.
Thirtieth Chant

When the sevenfold Dipper of first sky
-That neither dawn nor setting ever knew,
Nor with any other mist than guilt veild by,
And that made all therein fearful to eschew
Their duty, as our lower Dipper makes
Helmsmen steering rudder toward new

Haven- stood still, the truthful crowd which takes
Place midway between it and griffin, all
Turnd to the cart as if it held peace's stakes;

And one of them, as from heaven's own call,
"From Lebanon come, bride" thrice sang aloud,
And all the rest in tune with him would fall.

As the blessed will rise, leaving their shroud,
In haste at the last call from tomb and cave,
Singing lauds, for the worn again flesh proud,

Thus on the cart divine I saw to have
Risen, at such a dean's voice, a large throng
Of heralds of the eternal life men crave.

From all "Blessed, o Thou who come!" the song
Echoed; and, tossing flowers high around,
"With full hands, oh, spread lilies all along!"

Many a time did I see the eastern ground,
On day's beginning, all with rosy hue
Suffus'd, and from clear sky such light rebound;

And Sun's face to go up veil'd by a few
Wisps, so that, through the vapours' screen half shown,
Could long time without harm the eyes imbue:

Thus inside a bright cloud of petals, thrown
Up by the angelic hands, which then were seen
Falling around the cart from which had flown,

Upon a veil all white, mantled in green,
Girt by an olive branch, a woman stood
Wearing a dress which of live flame had sheen.

And my spirit -that for long time withstood
Her absence, feeling not the wondrous stun
And trembling fever from her presence's good-

Even before from eyes to heart had run
Knowledge of her, for covert virtue's flow
From her, by ancient love was overrun.

As soon as on my sight had hit the blow
Of the overwhelming might that pierc'd me yet
Before out of my childhood I would grow,
I turn'd expectant to my left, as set
Their hopes the children on their mother, when
They run to her by fright or grief upset,
To tell Virgil: "Less than a dram, I ken,
Of blood is left unshaken in my heart;
I know the signs of the ancient flame"; but then

Had left me in want of him Virgil's depart,
That sweetest father mine, Virgil to whom
I gave myself, to be sav'd, from the start;
Nor all that the ancient mother lost my doom
Could assuage, so that my cheeks -once clean'd
With dew- again were soil'd by tears and gloom.

"Dante, because from Virgil thou art wean'd
Do not cry yet, do not give way to tears;
By other wound it 's fit thou be demean'd."

As admiral who to stern and prow nairs
To look after the folks tending to their
Crafts, and toward good deeds all of them steers,
On the left side of the high cart, still where
She appear'd when to my name I turn'd -the name
Which needs I must record though I don't care-

I saw the belov'd woman without blame,
Veil'd by the angels' homage, aim her gaze,
From the other bank, on me who stood in shame.

Though the veil from her head falling with haze
Her looks, girded by Pallas' olive fronds,
Clouded, so less than fully shew'd their praise,
Regally aloft in her act, without bonds
She went on, as someone who says and still
Fiercer words, to be told later, absconds:

"Look me well! Well am I Beatrice. What will
Made thee deign this most blessed mount to ascend?
Did not thou know man 's happy on this hill?"

My eyes down to the clear waves did I send;
But seeing myself mirror'd in them, I drew
My gaze to ground, such shame my head would bend.

As to the son the mother seems, for due
Rigour, haughty, so she looked to me,
'Cause bitter is the taste of stern care true.

She fell silent; and the angels sang "In thee,
My Lord, I hoped" as soon; but not beyond
"Thou lent space to my feet" their song would be.
As on Italy's back Slav winds will bond
The snow among the living beams, congeal'd
By freezing currents on ground and on frond;
Then, by melting, its moisture is reveal'd,
Provided shadeless lands warm winds will blow,
So that it looks as wax by flame unseal'd,

Thus my own tears and sighs never did flow
Ere I heard the sweet notes of those who sing
On rhythms the spinning heavens ever sow;

But when I 'd heard their mild melodies ring
With compassion for me, more than if they
Had said: “Woman, why him so hard to sting?”,

The frost that round my heart so tightly lay
Became water and breath, and of my breast
And mouth and eyes with anguish left the bay.

She stood on the cart's side, poised at rest,
And to the devout spirits who had sung
These words of her thereafter thus address'd:

“You keep vigil in days seamlessly strung,
So neither night nor sleep steals from your sight
Any event that the world from time has wrung;

Therefore my answer I intend by right
To be receiv'd rather by him who cries
Yonder, to make the sorrow match guilt's might.

Not by the deed alone of spinning skies,
That address ev'ry seed to a certain end
According to the way each star there lies,

But for largesse which divine graces send
As rain from clouds so aloft, our feeble sight
Not even near to their high seat can tend-

This man was, in his youthful life, with might
So wide virtually endow'd, any good skill
Would have in him shone with amazing light.

But all the more wild, noxious weeds shall spill
On land bereft of plough and of good seed,
The more good, earthy strength its soil did fill.

For some time with my looks I met his need:
Shewing to him those young bright eyes of mine,
Toward straight aims his path then I could lead.

As of my second age I pass'd the line,
Entering youth, and to other life was cast,
He tore himself from me for paltry shine.

When in spirit and flesh I had at last
Ascended, and my virtue and beauty had grown,
His love for me became less and less fast;

And through fallacious way his wings had flown,
Following false images of good, that lure
With promises which soon untrue are shown.
Nor was of any avail with prays to endure
For good insight, with which in dream and wake
I call'd him back: for useless was the cure.

He fell so low, for his redemption's sake
All remedies were short already, unless
He could visit the folks damn'd at the stakes.

For this the reign of Death I did ingress,
And weeping gave my prayers to the shade
Of one who to this spot could him address.

Some high judgment of God would come unmade,
Should Lethe river be pass'd, and its stream
Be tasted without reckoning, lacking aid
Of repentance that him with tears redeem."
“O thou standing beyond the sacred stream,” 
Began she again, joining without a pause 
The former slanted speech—which hard did seem—

With direct word to me, the more to impose: 
“Tell, tell whether it’s true: to charge of weight 
It behoves thy confession follows close.”

My virtues were in such confused state 
My voice, as soon as called up, before 
From its organs were issued, would abate.

Small wait she suffer’d; then “What now” said more 
“Dost thou think? Answer me, for the stream still 
Did not erase thy memories most sore.”

Fear and confusion mix’d in me, my will 
Made me send such a “yes” out of my lip 
That hardly sight’s, not ears’, would pass the sill.

As a crossbow breaks up, when at once trip 
For excess tension the spring and the bow, 
So with less strength hits target the arrow’s tip,

Thus burst I then for her words’ heavy blow, 
Out sending copious tears and sighs; words’ sound 
Was slacken’d through its path and came out low.

And she said yet: “Within thy desire’s bound, 
When thou wert led to love the supreme good 
Beyond which nothing can to man redound,

What ditch or chain athwart thy path thou could 
Have found, for which thy forward journey’s aim 
So readily from mind divest thou should?

And what advantage or comfort could thou claim 
From other goods’ semblance, to make thee choose 
To sport with them, as lover with his dame?”

A bitter sigh having then drawn out, loose 
My voice hardly became to make reply, 
And hardly escap’d my words the lips’ tight noose.

Weeping “The things of present time” said I 
“My steps with false appeal turned aside, 
As soon as your sweet face hidden did lie”.

And she: “Should fail to mention thou, or hide, 
What now thou dost confess, not the less known 
Would be thy faults: before such judge they ride!

But when sin’s charge is bursting out of own 
Mouth, in our court leniency makes the wheel 
Revolve against sword’s edge, and mercy is shown.
Nonetheless, so that thou right shame should feel
Now of thy error, and with sirens’ lure
More strongly can in future juncture deal,

Put down the seed of tears, my words endure:
Thus shalt thou hear how in opposite way
My buried flesh should have mov’d thee for sure.

Never nature’s or art’s such pleasure lay
In front of thee, as the fair limbs which jailed
This soul of mine, and in the earth now stay;

And if this peak of joy at last had failed
Thee for my death, what mortal thing could draw
Thee to crave that, which to my semblance paled?

Well should thou rise, when the first hit thou saw
Of the vanity of things, after the lead
Of me who knelt no longer to such law.

Nor should have weighted down thy feathers’ speed,
To wait for further hits, comely maid
Or another vain thing of transient seed.

A nestling two or three misfortunes bade
Hardly; but full-fledg’d birds in vain are snar’d
With nets, nor are they hit by arrows’ raid.”

I stood as child who, ashamb’d, at the ground star’d
With bashful eyes, and listening shall wince
Recognizing his fault, of all pride bar’d;

When in her chiding she went on thus: “Since
Thou feel pain from my words, thy beard now rise,
That greater pain from looking thou don’t mince”.

With less reluctance is uproot’d great size
Of stout oak, be the cause familiar wind
Or a storm from the land of Iarba wise,

Than that I won in lifting the chin, pinn’d
To my chest; when for “face” the beard she named,
Well did I know which poison therein dinn’d.

And as my face went up, my sight then framed
Those first creatures by whom flowers were thrown:
From doing that had stopp’d their hands unblamed.

And my eyes, still uncertain, were then shown
Beatrice turn’d to me, pois’d on the beast
In which one person in twain nature’s known.

Under her veil, on yonder bank, she pleas’d
All sights, winning her ancient beauty more
Than she won others, ere her life had ceas’d.

Repentance’s nettle prick’d my inner core
So much, that I took then in utmost spite
What most had turn’d me away from her before.
Gratitude in excess bit me, and quite
Overwhelm'd, I fell down; what later I
Was, she knows who caus'd me with me to fight.

Then, when the heart had called back all my
Wits, I saw that the wench I 'd found alone
Above me stood, saying: “Hold on!” nearby.

Drawn by her in the current, I had gone
Down to my neck; she pull'd me on, appearing
To skim the waters, light as leaf windblown.

When the blessed far bank we both were nearing,
“Asperges me” was heard in tones so sweet,
I cannot write, nor even recall hearing.

The winsome lass open'd her arms, and fleet
Clasping my head, thrust it under the stream,
And me to that new drink thus did she treat.

Taking me out, she entrusted to the team
Of the four dancing beauties my wet care;
Their arms clothed my person as in dream.

“We are here nymphs, but stars in heavens were;
Ere Beatrice to the world was sent, as maid
Each was assigned after her to care.

We 'll take thee to her eyes; but shall give aid
To sharpen thine into her inner light
The three beyond, whose gaze deeper was made.”

Thus singing they began; and after right
Up to the griffin's breast they 'd led me, where
Beatrice stood, toward us turning her sight,

They said: “Be bold, thy glance henceforth don't spare:
In front of the bright emeralds thou stand
From which had shot once Love its arrows fair”.

A thousand longings took the upper hand
On me, hotter than flame, binding my eyes
To those resplending on the griffin; and

As in mirror the sun, not otherwise
Into those would radiate the twofold beast,
Now in this, now in that different guise.

Think, reader, for thyself if I was teas'd
Seeing that essence in itself stand fast,
While by manifold shapes its form was seiz'd.

As full of wonder and of joy at last
My soul was tasting that supernal food
By which, though sat'd, renewed hunger 's cast,

The other three, forward proceeding, would
Dance to the angelic tune of their concert,
Showing how they belong'd to higher brood.
“Deign, Beatrice, deign thy blessed gaze be sent”
Was their song "toward him whose faithful pace,
To reach thee, through so long a way was bent!

Grace to us render, conceding the grace
To unveil thy mouth, so that he can discern
The further beauty of which thou hid the trace.”

O shine of ever living light! Who, stern
Strains enduring, went pallid in the shade
Of Parnassus, or drank in its cistern,

Could not feel that his wits dim had been made,
If trying to describe how thou there seem’d
When in thee was sky’s harmony displayed,

As thy unveiling in free air thus gleam’d.
So much fix'd was my stare, intent to slake
My ten years long unquenched thirst, that all
Other senses not a thing could in them take.

And on both sides of my eyes was a wall
Of uncaring -so much the saintly smile
Drew them to it, into the old net to fall!-

When forcibly my face was turned, while
From my left side I heard the divine maids
Say: “Too fixed: the shine his sight will rile!”

And the power to see, that in man fades
When the sun hits with force the eyes, caus'd me
Some time be left, without my sight, in shades.

But when the sight came back and let me see
The small things (I say 'small' when I compare
Them with the grand image I had to flee),

I saw the glorious army now to bear
To the right, and go back, having the sun
And the sevenfold flame in front to stare.

As in cohort the soldiers on the run
Under the shields are turning with their flag,
Bending file ere have turned all and one,

Thus the staff of the cart to turn would lag
Until th' heavenly reign's soldiers had pass'd,
Proceeding, beyond us to the last tag.

Then the maids near the wheels again were cast;
The griffin drew along the blessed cart,
And not a feather shook, so it held fast.

Statius and I then hastened to start
- With the beautiful wench who made me cross-,  
Behind the wheel which took of way less part.

Thus walking through the empty wood, whose loss
Is due to guilt of her who trust'd the snake,
An angels' song beat our steps across.

Methinks three arrow's flights the distance take,
If strongly shot, which we had walked, when
Her descent from the cart Beatrice did make.

I heard all whisper “Adam”; they went then
Around a tree bereft of all its leaves
And fronds on any branch within my ken.

Its foliage widens as high up it heaves,
And at its height would wonder Indians, whose
Forests boast many a tree which the sky cleaves.
“Bless’d thou, o sacred griffin, ’cause thou choose
Not to chip with thy beak this sweet-tast’d wood,
Since each belly, eating it, its health would lose.”

Such cry around the stalwart tree then would
Utter the others; the twain-natur’d beast
Said: “Thus is sav’d the seed of all the good”.

And, turning to the shaft he had releas’d,
He drew it to the foot of the bare tree,
And to tie shaft to trunk he then was pleas’d.

As our plants, when the great light we see
Pouring down mix’d with that which shines behind
The constellation swimming in sky’s sea,

Become swollen, and then life’s mights remind
Each of its proper hues, ere the Sun teams
Its horses under stars of other kind,

Thus, opening its tint to hue that seems
Between viola and rose, on each branch bare
Renewed foliage now suddenly teems.

I did not comprehend the song which there
Those folks sung, nor is it on earth intended;
Neither did I endure all that sweet air.

Could I the cruel eyes paint, how they tended
To sleep when Argus of Siringa heard
-The eyes to which the wake dire fate portended-;

As painter who portrays models, I ’d car’d
To draw here how by fast sleep I was won;
But for another brush this work is spar’d.

Hence I come straight to when my sense came on
Again, and say that a bright shine then rent
The sleep’s veil, and a voice said: “Rise anon!”

As Peter, John and James were a time sent
To contemplate the blooms of the apple tree
Which of its fruit can angels’ greed make spent

(As in celestial wedding feast), to be
Brought back, utterly won, to the word by
Which deeper slumbers were conquer’d, and see

Their ranks of Moses and Elijah lie
Bereft, and changed of their Lord the vest
And appearance: thus on that spot came I

Around, and saw that saintly woman rest
Near me, the same who had guided my way
Previously along the stream to her sweet best.

And all suspended “Beatrice” I say
“Where is?” And she: “Look at her there a-sitting
On the root of the tree clad by new May.
Look at those all round her: the rest are quitting,  
After the griffin, and ascend to sky,  
While sweeter, deeper notes their song is hitting”.

If any longer did she speak, can I  
Not tell: already in my eyes was she  
Who forbade other thoughts in me to lie.

She seem’d, sitting alone on earth, to be  
Left as a warden of the cart I ’d seen  
The twain-natured beast tie to the tree.

Cloistered all around was there my queen  
By the seven saint nymphs, of whose bright lights  
Neither north winds, nor south, can dim the sheen.

“But a small time thou ’ll see these sylvan sights;  
And without end thou shalt abide with me  
That Rome in which Christ is Roman by rights.

To help the wicked world, let henceforth be  
Fix’d on the cart thy eyes, and care to write,  
When on the earth again, what thou shalt see.”

Thus Beatrice; and I turn’d mind and sight  
To where she wish’d, eager my will to cast  
To her demands in full obeisance tight.

I never saw lightning come down so fast  
From thick cloud, when it rains from that far sky  
Whose lay remotest is from earth, and last,

As Jove’s bird to plunge down then witness’d I  
Through the tree, breaking in its flight the bark  
The new fronds and flowers it went by.

And it hit with full force the standing ark,  
For which it listed, as a ship in gale  
To star or port is toss’d by waves’ strength stark.

Then I saw hurl herself into the tail  
Of the triumphal cart a fox, as lean  
As if of food she could never avail;

But, her reproaching of foul guilts and mean,  
My lady turned her in flight, as fleet  
As consented her bones, of flesh near clean.

Then one more time, down from its lofty seat,  
I saw the eagle come into the cart,  
And leave feather’d the ark which ere was neat;

And, as if issu’d from a sorrow’d heart,  
A voice came from the sky and such words spell’d:  “O poor vessel of mine, so badly marr’d!”

Then between the cart’s wheels the surface swell’d  
And broke: a drake came out, and its sharp tail  
Thrust up, and through the cart’s bottom impell’d.
And, as a wasp withdraws the noxious nail,
Its tail it pulled back from where it had
Struck, taking staves with it, and left that pale.

What was left, as fertile earth by weeds clad,
Grew then all over feathers—from those first
Offer'd perchance with intent not all bad—

And was cover'd with them: the wheels were erst
Plumed, and then the staff, in so short space
That more keeps the lips open a sigh's burst.

Thus transformed, on each its part a face
Sent forth the sacred structure: on each side
One, and three more along the staff's long trace.

Those on the staff of ox had horns and hide;
The four's forehead a single horn did show:
Never was seen such a monster worldwide.

As on high mount a castle, with proud brow
A whore loosely sat on it; her glance
Hither and thither dartingly she 'd throw.

And, as in ward of her, in jealous stance
A fiercest giant at her side appear'd;
Oft of kissing each other they took chance.

But, seeing toward me her gaze she 'd steer'd
With wanton eyes, that fierce lover's harsh paw
Lash'd her from head to foot; and then he clear'd

The monstrous cart from its bonds, and in raw
Anger and wild surmise, dragg'd it inside
The wood, which shielded it, until I saw

Naught more of him and of his whorish bride.
Thirty-third Chant

“O God, what folks came” then the wenches began,
Alternating by threes and fours, the sweet
Song, and tears all the while down their cheeks ran;

Beatrice with her pious sighs their tears would meet,
Listening raptly so, that not much more
Mary’s sight was transform’d at the cross’feet.

But as the other virgins call’d her fore
To have her say, she rais’d herself up straight,
And riposted, red-hued as a flame’s core:

“You’ll see not me, ere a short time you wait;
And then again, sisters most cherish’d mine,
I shall be seen ere present hour grows late.”

All seven then she mov’d to the first line,
And after her the woman, me and the wise
Old man who wait’d on me she sent by sign.

Thus she walk’d on; and not ten times did rise
Her foot from ground, and to ground went again,
When with her eyes mine eyes held in a vise;

With quiet countenance said: “Faster pace gain,
So that, if I with thee should like to talk,
To listen to my words thou hast no pain”.

As I was beside her, speeding my walk,
“Brother”, said she, “why, going now abreast,
To ask after thy wish thou seem to balk?”

As man who, mov’d by object worth of best
Reverence, becomes shy, so that, spellbound,
His words cannot with lively voice be express’d,

So was made I, who with less than whole sound
Began: “My lady, well to ye is known
What’s my need, and what can for it be found”.

Counter’d she then: “I wish thee from thy own
Fear and shame disentangled come at last,
Not speaking words as words in dreams are blown.

Learn that the vessel wretch’d by the drake’s blast
Was, and no longer is; but he who guilt
Carries for it, for God’s vengeance is cast.

Heritance shall not always go unfulfill’d
Of the eagle that clad with plumes the cart,
Which first became a monster and then was pill’d;
For with certainty I see, speaking my heart,
Under fair stars near ripe to be the time,
Safe from disbar or hitch from any part,

In which the woman wallowing in slime
Of theft, by “FIVE-FIFTEEN” God-sent is killed
With the giant partaking of her crime.

And methinks these my words, with darkness fill’d,
As Themis’ or as Sphinx’, leave thee in doubt,
‘Cause hard their sense is in thy mind instill’d;

But soon events will solve with final clout,
As Laiades, this now mysterious speech,
Herds’ slaying and grain’s waste doing without.

Take note; and as these tales to thee I teach,
With the same words relate to those alive
Of that life which in death finds its last beach.

And from thy readers not to hide hard strive,
When thou shalt write, what sight thou gained now
Of the tree twice despoil’d, here meant to thrive.

Whoever steals from it or wrecks somehow
Its limbs, blasphemously God’s orders strains,
‘Cause for Himself He chose its growth to allow.

For having bitten it, in wishful pains
More than five thousand years did the first man
Wait for Him who on Himself took all men’s stains.

Thy wit’s asleep, if it scarcely can
Appraise the reason why its top, though rais’d
To such exalted height, is so overran.

And if had been not in vain thoughts encas’d
Thy mind, as rock in Elsa water, and,
Berry in Pyramus’ blood, by lust debas’d,

If only by so many signs, to hand,
In the forbiddance, this high tree would bring
God’s justice with strong-stated moral stand.

Since thy mind hard I see as a stone thing,
And in such hardness ill the truth inferring,
So that it’s dazzled by these mine words’ ring,

I wish those tales thou keep inside unerring,
If not clear writ, at least faithfully painted,
As palm-girt staff a holy trip’s averring.”

And I: “As soon with words of yours acquainted,
My brain is etched by them, as wax by seal,
Which by the impress’d image lastingly’s tainted.

But why the long’d-for words so much my zeal
Overcome, highly flying, that my poor sight,
The more it strives, the more fails their appeal?”

“So that” she answer’d “thou can know by right
The school thou follow’d, and how its doctrine
Falls short to keep in touch with my words’ light,

And that thou see how far from God’s is thine
Way; it’s farther indeed from it as much
As far from earth spin stars which farthest shine.”

For which I counter’d: “I recall not such
Estrangement from you, nor in my wit
Can I find the regret to have lost touch”.

“If thou now no remembrance hast of it”
Smiling she said, “then call to present mind
Lethe’s waters to drink for thee was fit;

And as from smoke fire’s presence man can find,
In thy forgetting is contain’d the guilt
Embodied in thy will elsewhere aligned.

Nak’d for sure henceforth my words be spill’d
Is fit, to make them plain as much as thy
Rough-hewn sight needs to be by light infill’d.”

And flaming more and slower-pac’d the sky
Held the sun, pois’d at the meridian plane,
Hither and thither on earth’s face to lie,

When all the seven wenches stood on their lane,
As stands a party’s leader, should he meet
An unexpected thing, or its trace gain.

At the edge of a shade they halted their feet,
Not unlike that which Alps throw, under green
Leaves and black trunks, on streams devoid of heat.

Euphrates, before them all, with Tigris seen
Were by me, of a source issued, to part
Lazily, as to part friends are not keen.

“O light, o glory of the human kind, what art
Makes these waters, which are so entwin’d at their
Beginning, thus diverge after their start?”

For this request she told me: “Ask now there
Mathelda to explain”. And then, as trying
To be absolv’d from a guilt, answer’d the fair
Woman: “Already I told him, without lying,  
This all and more; and as sure thing I ’d say  
For Lethe’s stream his recall is not dying”.

And Beatrice: “Perchance, as oft astray  
Memory is led by weightier care, his mind  
Was obscur’d and impeded in sight’s way.

But Eunoe’s streams away down yonder wind:  
Lead him to them, and, as thou ’rt wont, ensure  
That new vigour be lent to his stunn’d mind.”

As excuses seek not the kind souls pure,  
But make their own the neighbour’s will, as fast  
As of it, through outward signs, they are made sure,

Thus, by hand taking me, then moved past  
The winsome wench, who with feminine grace  
Told Statius: “Now with him thy steps be cast”.

Had I here, reader mine, more ample space  
To write on, I would sing partly as how  
From that sweet drink I ’d never turn my face;

But since all leaves are full already now  
Disposed for this poem’s second book,  
To my own art’s restraint I ’d better bow.

I came back from the most hallowed brook  
Made anew, such as new sprouts on the mend  
With newly verdant fronds, since off I shook

All sins, and to the stars I long’d to ascend.
PARADISE
Foreward

A summing up and a farewell

“…Ergo vivida vis animi pervicit, et extra processit longe flammantia moenia mundi, atque omne immensum peragravit mente animoque…”

(Titus Lucretius Carus, De Rerum Natura, Book I, vv. 72 – 74)

It was inevitable. On one hand those among my friends who had been critical of my two earlier attempts neither would be surprised, nor would they form a worse opinion of me, for my obduracy in taking this third step. On the other hand, those few who had appreciated my “Hell” and “Purgatory” would perhaps be disappointed if I should fail to “walk the extra mile”.

Last but not least, I would have been loath to have voluntarily begun a task, however foolhardy, and left it unfinished.

As previously, I tried first of all (in March 1999, soon after finishing my version of “Purgatorio”) the two Chants with which the “Paradiso” begins and ends. The much greater difficulties - in comparison with “Purgatorio” - that I had feared in anticipation did not actually seem to materialise after all: so I went on, following the same order adopted in the preceding attempt (see page 1 of my foreword to “Purgatory”).

What a surprise! In the first month of work (March 1999) I translated eight Chants: all pessimistic estimates I had cautiously made of the time that would be required by this last translation were - for the time being - utterly contradicted.

In the second month six more Chants were translated. The rate at which my work progressed, though not as frantic as in the first month, was still on the same level as the best rates achieved in the earlier translations. At the end of May I was about in midstream and I felt that I had passed the point of no return. Of course there were still external occurrences which could prevent me from reaching the final goal: but I would not, henceforth, have voluntarily stopped.

In June my rate of work stabilised at about twelve tercets a day (a Chant every four or five days). This was fast enough for me, and at the same time not too tiring as a “cruising” speed to be sustained at length…

…But suddenly I experienced a painful slackening of tension, a drying up of the inventiveness that had sustained my word-hunting and rhyme-hunting till then: all along Chants n° 10 and 12 I dragged on miserably, feeling that I was drafting worthless, drab verses. I began to fear that I would never be able to complete the translations still awaiting me with anything even remotely approaching an acceptable standard. Fortunately, by forcing myself to be calm and abstaining from rushing things, I felt gradually this oppressive feeling to lift and confidence to return; occasionally I would panic again, but another delicate turning point along the strenuous road had been gone through.

In July, apart from an interval of two weeks at the seaside during which I abstained on purpose from pursuing my self-appointed job, I was able to resume a more or less “normal” schedule, beginning with the sixteenth Chant.

The pace ground to a halt again in the first half of August, what with the necessity to attend to family matters away from my Milano home, with only six Chants still to go; however, as soon as possible I was back at work, eager to complete a task whose end was already in tantalising sight. On 17th of September my Mother died, after 93 years of a full, eventful life, encompassing two World Wars and unbelievable changes in lifestyles. Those long years she constantly lived in the firm belief which I so sorely lack. She now is beyond the sill of mystery, and I can only wait at that boundary with respect and understanding. I dedicate this ill-hewn work of mine to her.

* * *

Apart from feeling slightly ill at ease trying to adopt (as, having appointed myself a Paradise’s translator, I was bound to do, albeit momentarily) Dante’s strictly Catholic views on dogmatic
matters -which I feel may sometimes be at odds with the prevailing modern, lay mentality: at any rate, they often were with mine-, I went about this task not only with relatively little fatigue, but almost with a feeling of elation. Once again I was given the opportunity of going in depth into a part of Dante's poem which I knew but very marginally from bygone high school days (in those times Inferno was read quite extensively, but Purgatorio and Paradiso were studied in a more cursory way). Trying furthermore to preserve in English metric structure, rhyme and essential semantic content of the poem was an enterprise which, however crazy it may look to an outside observer, responded to a long-cherished dream of mine. [I must admit that I reflected, from time to time, on the ancient saying 'Woe to the man to whom the Gods grant the realisation of his dreams!']

I have just confessed to a sense of unease in trying to interiorise the feelings of Dante when talking - and this happens quite often in "Paradise"- about dogmatic points of Catholic faith. Apart from this, I couldn't help but admire a very "modern" aspect of his narration: he describes, indeed, the heavenly spirits he purportedly meets in the most abstract possible terms (in contrast not only with the very concrete images of the afterlife prevailing at his times, but with his own descriptions of Inferno and Purgatorio): points or spheres of light, sparkles, radiations, immersed in music and songs. (The only senses remaining active in Paradise are, indeed, sight and hearing; the more corporeal senses of smell, touch and taste, all active in some degree in the preceding parts of the poem, are here totally muted). God himself is depicted (Chant XXVIII) as a dimensionless, blinding point of light. (Only in the very last Chants do the blessed reveal their true likeness to a Dante on whom superhuman qualities are bestowed).

I should also mention the vivid impression of motion and speed conveyed by those abstract descriptions: the luminous entities are seen not in a static context but, quite often, as perceived in very fast flight: this contributes to a sense of infinitely receding spaces, to images of a grandiose background in dynamic evolution which remain etched on the reader's retina, as it were.

The human side of Dante's sensitivity is, on the other hand, preserved in the similes he uses to convey to the reader the sensations caused by these incorporeal entities; these similes are, in fact, as powerful as ever and quite often very moving.

As in his journey through the nine heavens and beyond Dante meets higher and higher degrees of perfection, the effort to express in words the ineffable becomes more and more apparent; needless to say, while Dante meets the challenge with astonishing results, this poses additional difficulties for the poor translator. [Or is this perhaps a partly misleading remark? As I have already stated in my two previous forewords, I had the impression -I don't know how much truthful- that the "better" translated Chants were just those "more difficult" in the sense just alluded to: witness to it the 33rd Chant, in which Dante tackles the "impossible" description of the direct vision of God. In translating this justly famous Chant I was driven almost to tears by the beauty and intensity of feeling of Dante's verses, and my work went on, if not at all "easily", at least with a spontaneity and fluency rarely experienced on other occasions.

Also, I cannot refrain from mentioning that in this last Chant the expressions Dante employs seemed to me, sometimes, to hint mysteriously at conceptions of the Universe dynamics much more advanced than those prevailing at his times, viz. at the force of gravity as the power ruling the heavens' motion and even at a four-dimensional space replied on itself... Of course it is highly probable that I was (mis)led, by casual associations of words, to read in his verses ideas that only our modern knowledge can put in connection with them (and I am confirmed in this rational appraisal by, e. g., the numerous digressions to be found in Paradiso about the Ptolemaic conception of the heavens' spheres, which Dante fully endorses). All the same, an irrational sense almost of awe lingered on, as if I were on the verge of casting a sidelong glance at the hidden workings of an all-knowing mind. (Another reader could well fail to share this personal impression, needless to say)].

To complete this review of my feelings vis-à-vis Dante's ways of dealing with articles of faith, I should mention that it strikes me how bold and daring Dante was in depicting himself to be raised in flesh and blood to Heaven: this could well have been considered sacrilegious by Catholic doctrine, which maintained that only Christ and the Virgin Mary had been raised to Heaven with their bodies! It is true that the rigours of Inquisition during Counter-reformation were still in the distant future in Dante's times, and that Dante found asylum at the courts of noblemen
more or less in alliance with the Emperor rather than with the Pope, thus being relatively sheltered from persecution purely religious ground; but all the same, I feel, it took a very daring and unconventional attitude to take such a leap - and it took considerable courage, too, in sternly reprehending Popes and high prelates, as Dante often did in his verses. [It is worthwhile to recall that Dante was condemned to death - and became a lifetime exile from his hometown - in 1302 for his political stance. But his openly advocated position being that the city-state had to strive for independence from Papacy and separation of spiritual and temporal powers, in a sense it had put him squarely in opposition to the highest religious authority; he had therefore little to lose either in reconfirming his political views in poetry or even in taking some artistic liberty with orthodox religious doctrine. In fact, Dante's poem fell under strong suspicions of heterodoxy a few years after his death.]

As a last remark on Dante's inventiveness, I would venture as far as to say tentatively (and of course paradoxically) that Dante inaugurated a sort of glorified "fantasy" genre (although one can find earlier examples in classical Greek or Latin authors), in the sense that he tried to construct a fictional world of otherworldly wonders that could appeal strongly to the natural thirst of the average man for the marvellous while at the same time being firmly rooted on strongly held contemporary "certainties". The fact that the world he built up had a religious infrastructure was not only a consequence of his deeply felt beliefs, but also a master stroke of genius allowing him to lend nearly absolute credibility - in the cultural world view of his contemporaries - to the wondrous images conjured by his poetry. As in all fiction of genius (see e.g. Cervantes' *Don Quijote*) he then used this very appealing vehicle to convey his personal convictions, be they political, ethical, aesthetic etc.

* * *

Some of my first remarks may, however, have given my reader the wrong impression that the human and political passions so vehemently displayed in "Inferno" and "Purgatorio" are more subdued in Dante's "Paradiso". This is not quite the case: Dante purports to meet in Heaven with a number of fellow Florentines who hotly denounce the moral and political decadence of his town, as well as with key historical figures of the European scene who give him occasion to express polemically his views about the conflicts affecting the dialectic relationship between Church and Empire, so central to Dante's political conceptions. The driving political engagement of the Poet is, therefore, an ever-present undercurrent even in the midst of the most inspired images of a transcendent world of sanctity and asceticism. The strong, irrepressible feelings of the exile find thus quite often their way to the surface of the narration, lending earthly turbulence to an otherwise highly sublimated subject.

* * *

But maybe the greatest wonder, on which my thoughts were drawn very frequently to dwell, is the fact that Dante can be still understood, and can arouse powerful emotions, after seven centuries and almost unimaginable changes in mores, mentality, linguistic and cultural background. This wonder can be entirely felt, perhaps, only by a mother-tongue Italian, and maybe this very consideration was at the root of the subconscious motivations of my bizarre urge to attempt an English translation (being convinced, as I am, that English has become the modern replacement of Latin as the lingua franca of the learned community).

* * *

Again my relatives and friends were - although by now quite accustomed to my eccentricities - intrigued by this last effort of mine. But of course the impact of novelty was no longer at play, and in some a sense of satiety was by this time prevailing; other friends had grown quite jaded in their taste and judged this third translation with a much more critical eye than they had the former two. I was not deterred by this decrease of interest, although it made me perceive with a sharp pang of regret that a very exhilarating period of my life was nearing its end.
However, I think this is perhaps the right time and place to express my gratitude to all those who out of friendship or mere kindness were willing to take cognisance of my work. Foremost among these is my often-cited good friend Carlo “Nikko” Niccolai, who not a few times put me right with his critical remarks, but always managed to encourage me to go on, in the way only a real friend knows how to: with affection but without indulgence. Likewise my wife Cesira, though frequently very critical of my linguistic contortions (she is a former English teacher), never discouraged me from going on, despite the remarkable amount of time I spent on the translation; she was in fact quite pleased that I decided to have a limited number of copies made for distribution among our closest friends.

Kind appreciation was also expressed, among others, by:

On *Inferno*: late Prof. Umberto Bonapace, Eng. Wolfgang Pircher (Austria), Prof. Giulio Maier, Prof. Enrico Marchi;

On *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*: by Ms. Alison Bartle (U.K.); by Mr. and Ms. Juan Carlos Rodriguez (U.S.A.);


To one and all I wish to express my heartfelt thanks for their patience and understanding.

* * *

And again, before taking leave for good, I feel compelled to ask myself, as if confessing to my reader, some central questions which were posed since the beginning of this long endeavour (and mentioned briefly in my two previous commentaries), but still remain largely unanswered.

Why to attempt such a translation at all? And, having decided to embark upon it, why to obstinately seek to preserve the metric scheme and rhyme? What is the meaning of having struggled for almost three years -through about 15,000 verses- to the final line of the monumental Poem? Is there in my effort a meaning which could be of interest both to myself and to my reader? Or was it all a senseless stab in the dark, raising no echo whatsoever?

Trying to find exhaustive answers to the above questions would be, I feel, much more difficult than labouring on the translation itself. However, I cannot elude them entirely - after all, I am sure these questions will present themselves very naturally to my reader and, should I not attempt to say something about them, my work would surely look as an enterprise either pathetic or presumptuous.

Given for granted that no human endeavour is ever undertaken, and subsequently carried out, on purely rational grounds, I feel bound to try and give, if not a rational explanation, at least some plausible motivations in response to the above interrogatives.

First as to the choice of preserving metre and rhyme: I could have perhaps dared to attempt a free-verse translation, or a different metric scheme, if I had been a poet (and, as such, had been able to retain the “flavour” of the Poem in freedom from external aids and constraints, helped only by a poet’s powerful gift for words and imagery); being not such a gifted person, I had to provide myself with a formal “prop” to systematically guide me along and to give at least an admittedly superficial resemblance of rhythm and sound. I may mention in passing (repeating again, somewhat, earlier statements of mine) that this choice, which struck most of my friends as one which in their eyes entailed surpassing difficulties, was not, in my opinion, such a rash step after all. It is true that it makes for a harsh constraint and that often it led me to a rather artificial, mechanical choice of words; but in general, after an initial period of hard-going, it was not so exceedingly difficult to intuitively find the right turn of phrase which would accommodate both syllabic quantity and rhyming. The greater conciseness of English, in comparison with Italian, usually gave me some elbow room to accommodate the rhyming without too arduous an effort. I readily acknowledge that this “method” -if the word can be used- can produce at best an acceptable imitation of the rhythm of Dante’s “terza rima” and a rather loose correspondence of semantic contents, far from being a guarantee of faithfulness to the Poem’s letter and spirit. Accept it as proof of my inherent limitations, rather than of ability. I am thus led once again to muse on the thorny problems of translation. [It is interesting to note
that Dante did not believe a “good” translation of rhyming poetry to be feasible; indeed, in Chapter VII of “Il Convito” he wrote: “E però sappia ciascuno, che nulla cosa per legame musaico armonizzata si può della sua loquela in altra trasmutare sansa rompere tutta la sua dolcezza e armonia” (And let anyone know, that no work composed according to rhyming consonance can be translated from its own tongue into another one without destroying all its sweetness and harmony).

If I try one last time to analyse here what ideally should be the qualities to be preserved by a “good” translation, I would feel inclined to say that they boil down essentially on one hand to the content, on the other hand to the form of the original text. The content in its turn can be divided into two different kinds: conceptual meaning and emotional charge, while the formal qualities encompass at least structure and elegance.

I think that in my efforts I managed more or less to preserve the conceptual meaning and the formal structure, but I certainly must give myself low marks in what concerns my rendering of emotional power and stylistic elegance.

If anyway you, dear Reader, are interested in knowing which of my translated Chants I found less wanting, here are -for what they are worth- my personal preferences:

HELL: XXVIth and XXXIIIrd Chants,
Purgatory: Ist and VIth Chants,
Paradise: Ist and XXXIIIrd Chants.

But the really hard question concerns the motivations of my effort. I sometimes felt in a position comparable to that of a mountaineer who on a sudden impulse begins to build a seagoing boat in his courtyard, without really proper tools or knowledge; my wife told me more than once instead that I was like a “bricoleur” building a model sailboat in a bottle.

There was in my endeavour an obvious component of self-testing through a tough challenge, as well as a strong element of “play” with language, but I think neither of these is -in itself or taken together- a sufficient justification.

It would be in a sense more understandable if I had read other English translations of Dante, and those had inspired me to try for a personal approach; but, as I stated earlier, this was not the case.

You see that I am led to define what it was not, rather than what it was... Perhaps only an empathic reader, or a psychologist, could see into it more clearly than I can myself.

The thing I know for sure is that I was happy to go along, as if discovering and charting an unknown, and at the same time familiar, territory, not much differently from the sensation we are bound to meet in certain dreams. As it was to be expected, the end brought with it an anticlimax accompanied by a sharp regret for the slackening of an intellectual tension which, though sometimes exhausting, was not a little exciting while it lasted.... I am reminded -si pars licet componere magnis- of the biblical fight of Jacob with the angel, which lasted through the night: I likewise fought a long, enigmatic battle -in darkness as to my real motivations- at the end of which I was left surely defeated, but at the same time enriched. Or, more appropriately, I could perhaps liken my three-year itinerary to a long pilgrimage, undertaken to somehow pay tribute to a larger-than-life figure and in the hope to get from this single-minded focussing of purpose something akin to an illumination of self-knowledge - the meaning of which, however, remains mostly inaccessible and inexpressible.

This is about all I can provide, dear Reader, in the way of illustrating my attitude vis-à-vis my own endeavour. If it appears insufficient, I beg you to look deep into yourself and ask if in every circumstance you could define in a crystal-clear way the origin of such and such action of yours. The results of such a honest appraisal can be unexpected.

* * *

And now the time has really come to take leave. I tried not to keep to myself what I did mainly following my own whim: hence this conversation with you, my Reader (is at least one of you out there?). If you stayed with me even for a short time, or if you decided to have a look at other...
translations of Dante, or better still to approach a reading of the original, I am satisfied and thank you warmly for your forbearance.

Adieu, and may a faint echo of Dante ring for some time in your inner ear!

Milano, 31 October, 1999
First Chant

The glory of him, who in motion sets all things,
Seeps through the fabric of the world, and shines
In one part more, to others less bright clings.

In the sky that more light from him aligns,
I stood, and saw what souls from there descended
Cannot retell, for ill our wit defines

Such things: ‘cause near to where its wishes tended,
Our reason’s plunged in abyss so deep,
To oblivion vainly are things by mind contended.

What puny treasure in my wit I keep
Of the holy kingdom seen, shall henceforth make
Of my song the last object and most steep.

O good Apollo, for my fealty’s sake
Convert me to such worthy vessel as
Thou demand, so thy laurel I can take.

Till here one top of the Parnassus has
Been enough; but I need now, for the fray
In front of me, to both of them address.

Into my breast now come, and thy breath lay
As when thou drew the wretched Marsia out
Of his limbs’ sheath after he lost the day.

O divine virtue, should thou blow about
My head so, that a pale shade of the high
Kingdom engrav’d in me I paint without,

Thou shalt see me nearing thy dear wood; I
Shall then be crown’d of those most prized leaves
I ‘ll have deserv’d, such lofty attempt to try.

So seldom, father, such a crown man weaves
To honour in triumph poet or king
- Shameful guilt that the human will bereaves -,

That the Peneian frond should always bring
Joy to the Delphic god, whenever it
With thirst for laurel happens us to sting.

Fierce flame to come after small spark is fit:
Perchance behind my steps with better song
Others shall pray, from Cyrrha to be lit.

The lantern of the world rises along
Different sources; but from that which lies
Where four circles with three crosses belong,

It comes forth with a better course, and flies
With better stars; and more after its mark
To imprint and seal the mortal wax implies.
This very source had made our side all dark
With night, and brought the morning to the side
To it oppos'd, colouring it white stark,

When I saw Beatrice's gaze, turnd, glide
To the left, looking straight into the sun:
No eagle star'd at it so long with pride.

And as the second ray after the one
Preceding it takes norm and up ascends,
As pilgrim who comes home with eager run,

Thus from her act, which the sight sense now sends
To my imagination, takes norm mine,
And more than wont my eye with sun contends.

Much is allowed there, where the pristine
Mankind was meant to live, which in our sphere
Our virtues find out of their own confine.

Not for long did I suffer the sun's mere
Splendour, nor shortly so I could not see
It sparkle as a rod which hot fires sear;

And suddenly a new day, lo! seems to be
Added to day, as if the Almighty chose
To adorn the sky with one more sun. And she,

Beatrice, stands fixing her eyes on those
Eternal wheels; and I on her my stares
Glue, and the upper sky from them foreclose.

And such staring at her new virtues bears
In me, not unlike Glaucos when he ate
The weed that made him god in marine lairs.

To become more than man, words can't relate
What is; but suffice my last ones, though few,
To those whom Grace shall make worthy of such fate.

Whether I was but what thou made anew,
Eternal love who on the skies preside,
Thou knowst, who with thy light upward me drew.

When my attention went toward the wide
Wheel which, drawn by the notes that thou intend
And rule, spins in eternal wish to abide

Near thee, sun's flames appear'd to me to incend
That much of sky, that neither stream nor rain
Could ever push a lake so wide to extend.

The novelty of the sound and the ample lane
Of light sparked in me longing so keen
As I had never felt, almost like pain.

For which she, who the inside of me had seen
Better than I, to calm my upset mind
Her mouth open'd ere I asking had been,
And began: “By thy fault thou fail to find
The truth, ‘cause of false hue thou paint in thee
What thou ’d see, should thou shake the swathes that bind

Thy wit. Though on the ground thou think to be,
Thou art not there; nor lightning, shot away
From its site, ran as fast as thou with me

Come back to it.” If I, formerly astray,
Was cleansed of my doubt by the short speech
She smil’d to me, new one was under way,

So I said: “Already what thou firmly teach
Fills me with immense wonder: but more I
Marvel at how past all light body I reach”.

For which she rais’d her eyes, with a pious sigh,
Toward me, with the semblance mothers show
When on delirious son they wait and spy,

And added: “All world’s things, on high and low,
Are set in order amongst them, and this
Is form which makes the world mirror God’s glow.

Here the high creatures see the imprint of His
Eternal virtue, that ‘s the final end
For which such order the world’s things can’t miss.

Natural laws within that order send
All things through diverse ways, to their first cause
Nearer some, while some others farther tend;

For which to various harbours move all those
Through the wide seas of being, and each one
Is guid’d by instinct that in it arose.

This drives the fire toward the moon to run;
This in the mortal hearts is forceful call,
By this within itself Earth ‘s drawn and spun:

Nor does this bow spring arrows only on all
Unwitted creatures, but as well on those
Whom reason lights and love’s feelings enthral.

Providence, of such wide order the cause,
With its radiance spreads quiet on the sky
In which the fastest sphere revolves close;

And now therein, as to the site where lie
Our destinies, brings us the virtue whose
Darts always toward blessed targets fly.

It ‘s true that, as the forms the artists choose
Are often from the intentions far apart,
‘Cause matter ‘s deaf, and answers but in loose

Ways, from the ordained course sometimes depart
The creatures, that have faculty to bend,
Thus push’d, toward some new, different part;
And as thou canst see stormy clouds to send
Lightning to earth, thus first tendencies may
Go awry, twist’d to false appealing end.

More wonder thou should not feel, I dare say,
For thy ascent, than for a flowing stream
That from high mount descends to lowest bay.

Worthy of wonder would be, should thou –I deem–,
Without hindrance of sorts, remain seat’d down,
As wondrous thing a still live flame would seem.”

Hence her face turn’d to the celestial town.
Second Chant

O ye who in puny vessel ply high seas,
Yearning to listen, sailing in the wake
Of my ship that with singing forward flees,

Better your course should backward home you take:
Don’t sail beyond to the deep waters where,
Losing my lead, you’d put safety at stake.

Follow the course I steer no one would dare;
Minerva fills my sails, Apollo leads
Me, and nine Muses are my pole up there.

But the small fold of you, whose longing feeds
For early yearning the angels’ bread, here prime
Food of which never sat’d are the souls’ needs,

Well can set prow with me, the high salt’s clime
Fearing not till you stay behind me close,
Ere the sea smoothes my wake in little time.

The glorious crew that to the Colchis chose
To sail did never wonder as you will
When Jason till’d the fields in front of those.

The thirst inborn in man -never to still-
Of the God-shaped realm took us up high
Nearly as fast as is spun the sky stars fill.

Up star’d Beatrice, at her was staring I:
And in the time, methinks, that arrows hit
And fly and the taut wood are hurled by,

I saw myself in place that drew to it
My sight with utmost wonder; for which she
For whom each smallest care of mine is lit

Turned to me cheerful and fair to see,
Saying: “Address thy thankful mind to God, who sent
To join the first bright star myself with thee.”

It seem’d to me that into a cloud we went
Solid, thick, smooth and bright with shining pride
Of diamond by which Sun’s rays are bent.

The eternal pearl received us inside
Its matter, as in water ray of light,
Leaving it whole, can travel far and wide.

If I was in the body, and here is quite
Unthinkable two bodies one space fill,
As they must when each other’s place they bite,

All the more should be kindled our soul’s will
To contemplate that essence where it’s seen
How man’s nature and God’s share the same sill.
There all shall see what here faith's truth has been,
Not by proof, but at once by itself known
As those first truths by evidence men glean.

I answer'd: “Lady mine, as can my own
Devotion, I give thanks to him who sent
Me thus far from the mortal world, and shown

All this. But tell: by what dark signs is rent
This body, such that down on earth they make
Men's minds with tales of Cain foolishly bent?”

She smiled awhile, and then: “If false way take
Mortals' opinions” said “where senses fail
With their key to disclose their own uptake,

For sure should not sting thee sharply the nail
Of wonder, since thou see with what short wing
Man's reason after senses can set sail.

But first tell me thy own thought on this thing.”
And I: “What here appears with various look
I think thick and thin matters to us bring”.

And she: “Thou 'll see for sure how false way took
Thy belief, if thou 'll listen with due care
What I shall say against thy former book.

Not a few lights in this eighth sphere lie bare
To ye, and these in strength and kind are seen
To be endow'd with diverse appearance there.

If by thickness and thinness could have been
Caus'd this, one virtue alone would act in all,
More and less distributed than the mean.

Different virtues it behoves should fall
From formal causes, and save one would those
Be excluded by thy reasoning's strict call.

Besides, if thinness were of shade the cause
As thou surmise, either somewhere would be
Wanting in matter whence its sheen arose

This planet, or as fat and lean thou see
Alternate in a body, thus inside
This volume dark and light leaves would meet we.

If the first case were true, it could not hide
From us in Sun's eclipses, for its rays
Would shine through, as in thin substance rays glide.

This does not pass: hence let us take the ways
Of the other case; and should I prove this wrong,
Falsified would remain what thy wit says.

If the thin parts are strewn not all along
Moon's width, there should be a point from which the dense
Will not let pass the rays, however strong;
And the sun's light would be reflected thence,
As are sent back the colours by a glass
That hides some lead behind its clear expanse.

Thou shalt oppose that the dark comes to pass
In those parts more than in the rest, because
The rays are there sent back deep in the mass.

But shall deliver thee from this false clause
An experience -should thou ever try it-,
As from that source all of your arts arose.

Take three mirrors; and two of them is fit
Thou set at equal distance from thine eye,
And between them the third farther to sit.

Looking at them, behind thy back make lie
A lantern that on all the three can shine
And its light, from all three reflected, spy.

Although in size the image farthest in line
Be wanting, in its quality thou 'll see
It shine with light not dimmer, nor less fine.

Now as under the blow of heat shall be
Bared the substance of the snow, from erst
Colour and cold made by the sun's rays free,

Thus thy wit made divested from its first
Error I wish to shape with so bright ray,
That as live sparkle on thy sight will burst.

Within the sky of divine peace takes bay
A spinning body, in whose virtue lies
The essence of all beings that there stay.

The heaven next to this, from which your eyes
Take many views, this essence then comparts
Into distinct contents, with diverse ties.

The lower spheres with variously set arts
Dispose to their own seed and their own end
The distinct matters of those various parts.

These members of the world below them send
And from above receive; as thou can see,
From grade to grade all those effects descend.

Take care to see how my speech's path will be
Steered toward the truth which thou desire:
To ford beyond alone I 'll thus teach thee.

The virtue and motion of each holy gyre
It behoves to be infus'd by blessed wit,
As by blacksmith in forge hammer and fire;

And the sky by so many fair stars lit
From the deep mind that spins its orb around
To take its own image and seal is fit.
And as within your dust the soul is found
Turn'd to diverse sense powers, through not few
Members which various forming mights surround,

Thus the divine intellect here will shew
Its goodness into countless stars widespread,
Turning itself upon its oneness true.

Diverse virtue with diverse tie is led
Toward the precious body it lends life to,
Within which, as in ye the soul, takes bed.

The happy nature whence those virtues do
Derive, admixed to the members shines
As will delight shine in live pupils too.

What diverse aspect light from light aligns
Comes from this virtue, not from thick and rare:
This is the formal cause from which the signs,

According to its degree, dark and light fare.”
Third Chant

That sun which first warmed with love my breast
Had reveal'd a fair truth's sweet aspect, by
Proving things, and disproving, to the best;

And, to profess myself corrected, I
Raised my head as much as it was fit,
The new certainty attain'd wanting to imply;

But a vision appeared just then, and it
Retain'd my heed so tightly, to gain sight
Thereof, all else escaped from my wit.

As through clear glass transparent to the light
Or through limpid and still waters -not deep
So, that the bottom to the eye be quite

Lost- our faces' images, coming back, seep
Weakly, not more or less than a white pearl
On white forehead into our sense can creep;

In such guise many a face saw I awhirl
Ready to speak, for which contrary I err'd
To him who lov'd his own mirrored curl:

Made aware of their presence, I infer'd
Those were mirrored semblances; so I
Turn'd back my stare, to find them; but averr'd

No one was there behind: again my eye
Brought I then forward, straight into the gaze
Ardent of my sweet guide, smiling close by.

"Don't be amaz'd that I smile" said "seeing the haze
Into which thy childlike thinking is lost,
'Cause it finds not firm footing in truth's maze,

But leaves thee in all kind of doubts engross'd,
As wont: true substances are these thou see,
Here confined because their vows were toss'd

Away. Therefore speak out and hear and be
Assured; for the light of truth which feeds
Those, lets not them their feet from it shake free."

And to the shade most to speak willing, needs
I addressed myself, and thus began,
As man whom too much eagerness on leads:

"O well created spirit, who now can
Taste in the rays of life eternal high
Sweetness, from which most souls are put in ban,

I shall enjoy thy fulfilling of my
Wish to learn of thy name and of your fates."

And she, ready and with laughing eyes, spake by:
“Our charity does not foreclose its gates
To right wish, if not as that which demands
All its courtiers be similar mates.

I wore down there of virgin nun’s the bands;
And if thy memory well looks inside
Itself, my look that beautified now stands

Shall not hide that Piccarda I am; beside
These other blessed souls I was sent here,
Blessed myself, in this slow sphere to abide.

Only of what by the Holy Ghost ‘s held dear
Our feelings are inflamed, and rejoice
But because to its will their order steer.

And though would down on earth seem low the choice
Given to us, this one we get because
Of our neglected vows was void the voice.”

For which riposted I: “In each your pose
Worth of wonder, a sort of divine sheen
Makes that your present looks do not disclose

The former ones: for this, slow have I been
In recognizing; but the help thou gave
Makes it easier now what was once seen

To identify. But tell: you that here have
Happy state, any more exalted place
-To see more and to be more friends- don’t crave?”

Toward the other shades she smil’d; with grace
So glad she answer’d then to my request,
She seem’d to burn of love before God’s face:

“Brother, charity’s virtues put to rest
Our will, making us wish nothing but that
Which we have, nor with other thirst us test.

Our will, should higher heaven we look at,
Would be discord with that of him, who here
Fixed the dwelling where we ever sat;

And this thou ’ll see cannot take place, for near
Our spinning spheres charity rules alone,
Whose nature in thy wit should clearly appear.

Nay, it is of the essence to our own
Being to keep within the divine will,
Onto which, as one thing, our wills we hone;

So that the way we ’re set from sill to sill
In this realm, is pleasing to us all
As to the king whose wishes our own fill.

And our peace we find in his will’s call:
This is the sea to which all flows, of things
It creates and from Nature’s laws befall.”
Heaven's bliss, I saw then most clearly, clings
To each sky, even though the supreme good
In equal way seeps not to all their rings.

But as it comes that of a given food
Man is sat'd, but another one craves still
And, thankful for the first, the second would

Ask to get, so with acts and words my will
Manifest'd I to learn what was the weft
Whose shuttle she did not draw to the fill.

“A perfect life and worthy achievements left
Sent to a higher sky the woman whose
Rule” said she “down on earth of good bereft

Makes that to veil ourselves and wake we choose,
Until death never parting with the spouse
Who accepts all vows not from his liking loose.

Her example my young soul did arouse
To leave the world, and be enclos'd in her vest,
And vow to obey the laws ruling her house.

Men inur'd to evil deeds my sweetest nest
Stormed, and took me away from it; and then
God knows what life I led at their behest.

And this adjoining sheen thou discern when
Looking at my right side, and which resplends
Of all the light of this our gleaming den,

What I say of myself, of her intends:
Nun she was, and from her as well was torn
The sacred band that to our heads shade lends;

But of her heart's true veil was never shorn,
Even after she was to the world thrown
Against her will, of all good mores forlorn.

The light of the great Constance is here shown:
She begot from the second Swabia's gale
The third, who 's left of their great might alone.”

Thus she spake; and then she took to sing “Hail,
Mary”, and still singing she faded from sight
As through dark waters sinking stones grow pale.

I follow'd her for as long as I might,
Then my eyes, when at last no longer would
See her, turn'd to my longing's brighter light,

And were all focus'd toward her for good;
But she blazed so much into my gaze
That to sustain her dazzling glare I could

Not; and for this my asking took long ways.
Fourth Chant

Between two meals, equally appealing and
At equal distance, a free man would die,
Ere to his teeth could bring some food his hand;

Thus between two fierce wolves' hungers would lie
A lamb, still, by two equal fears contended;
Or still would stand a hound two deer lur'd by:

For which, if I spake not, not reprehended
Should I be, between my two doubts so torn
-By necessity impeded-, nor commended.

I kept silent, but was my wish clear worn
On my expression, and my question too,
With much more heat than by clear words upborne.

As Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar to woo
Out of his anger, which unjustly had made
Him wicked, thus would then Beatrice do,

Saying: “Well can I see in what high grade
Two wishes pull on thee, so that thy care
Binds itself and cannot outside be said.

Thou reason: ‘If good will lasts in a fair
Mind, why another’s violence will cut
Its deserts’ measure, and the soul prize ‘ll pare?’

Besides, what thou reject in Plato, but
Here appears to be true -to stars come back
The souls- thy inwit keeps in other rut.

These are the questions against which now lack
Equally thy will’s faculties; thus first
I ‘ll treat that which most wickedly on the rack

Puts thee. No Seraph most of God his thirst
Sating, nor Moses, Samuel, that John
Thou choose to take, nor Mary, if such durst,

Have in another sky their seats laid on
Than these spirits thou saw just now, nor more
Or less years of their bless’d condition won;

But all make fair the upper heaven, store
Different getting of sweet life in that
The eternal breath divers’ly blows afore.

They shew’d themselves as if herein they sat
Not because be this sphere their own, but signs
To give of the upper one less highly aim’d at.

Thus it behoves we conform to confines
Of your wits, which from senses only learn
What then takes on of intellect the lines.
Thus the Scriptures to what you can discern
Condescend, attributing feet or hands
To God, but other meaning want you earn;

And the Holy Church with human looks and stands
Represents Gabriel, Michael and him who
Delivered Tobias from blindness’ bands.

What in Timaeus is said of souls, not true
To what herein thou see is found, at least
If to its words the apparent meaning ‘s due.

It says come back the soul of the deceas’d
To its star, thinking it was from that sever’d
When to give it life’s form Nature was pleas’d;

And perchance must the meaning be assever’d
Different from the words’ sound, and can be
Such that away with scorn should not be steer’d

Your wit. Should it assert these wheels not free
Of praise or blame for their influence, its dart
Would not fall wide of the true mark maybe.

This concept, wrongly intended, gave false start
To nearly all the world, so that mankind
Nam’d Jove, Mercury and Mars with wrongful art.

The other doubt still troubling thee ‘s of kind
Less venomous, for its malicious bent
Could not have caus’d thy path astray to wind

From me. Our justice to an unjust intent
To lean, when it so appears in mortal sight,
Is faith’s debate without heresy’s dent.

But since your own good judgement by its right
Can well pierce through to reach this truth, I can,
Satisfying thy wish, on this shed light.

If violence is when the offended man
Naught consents to the offender, then are not
Excus’d the souls thou saw across this span:

‘Cause strong wills, if denying consent, cannot
Fade away, but as fires by nature fight,
Should force bend untold times them from their spot.

For which, if will is bent even by slight
Amount, it bends to force; and so did those
Souls, who could have escap’d to saintly site.

Had their will been unassail’d, as chose
His gridiron to endure Saint Laurence, and
As Mutius sternly his hand on the coals close

Kept, thus should have them sent their will’s command
Back to where they ’d come from, as soon as torn;
But rarely is found so firm intent to stand.
And for these words—if firmly in thy mind borne
As thou should- is the argument defeated
From which vexation could have still been born.

But now athwart thy path thou find repeated
Cause of doubt such that, should thou fight alone,
Never could win: ere 'd be thy strength unseated.

I put into thy mind, as carv'd in stone,
That a bless'd soul could never tell a lie,
For close on it the primal truth e'er shone;

And from Piccarda then thou heard as by
Constance the veil’s affection was upheld;
So that it seems that contradict’d am I.

Many a time, brother mine, mankind beheld
The fact that, to escape a danger, one
Against will to do evil was compell’d;

As, against a son's duty not to run,
Almeon, after father's prays to kill
His mother, a son's piety did stun.

In such juncture thou should believe that will
Is admixed with force, and so conjoin’d
They make that no excuse the offence can fill.

Absolute will by harm shall not be enjoin’d;
But it complies in that it 's spurr’d by fear
To greater pain, by consent's lack, be join’d.

Therefore, when those Piccarda's words thou hear,
She speaks of the absolute soul's will, and I
Intend the other: to the truth both steer;"

Such were the waves of the saint river, by
The fount of ev’ry truth nourish’d; and mine
Desires this laid to rest, in peace to lie.

"O love of the first lover, o divine
Lady,” utter’d I then “whose words so flood
And warm me so, that more and more affine

My life, is not so deep love in my blood,
As to suffice to render grace for grace;
Give He who sees and can flower for bud.

Well see I now that never finds solace
Our wit, if it 's not shone upon by true
Light out of which no truth gains ever space.

There rests our wit as beast in lair is due,
Soon as it may; and that it can attain:
If not, no wish could e’er be grant’d issue.

From that is born, as sprout beside the main
Truth's trunk, the doubt; and this is nature's way
Pushing us, up the slope, the top to gain.
This spurs me on, this makes me bold to pray  
With reverence you, lady, to shed light  
On further truth that dark within me lay.

I wish to know if for void vow man might  
Vouchsafe with other deed that could pull still  
No wanting weight upon your scale's just sight."

Beatrice star'd at me: her eyes would fill  
With such divine sparkles of love, that my  
Faculties, won, were put in rout as nil,

And, downcasting my gaze, near lost was I.
Fifth Chant

“

If, in the ardour of my love, I blaze
Beyond what down on earth man’s wont to see,
So that thy eyes to mine thou cannot raise,

Don’t be amazed: for this proceeds in me
From perfect sight that, as intends the seen
Good, there moves steps, where it aspires to be.

Well do I see shine in thy wit the sheen
Of the everlasting light that, once perceiv’d,
Constant and sole tinder of love has been;

And if for something else is love conceiv’d,
Naught else it is if not of that a trace,
Ill apprehended, which from it ‘s receiv’d.

Thou wish to know if it ‘s allow’d man pays
With other money some defaulted vow,
Leaving his soul on unlitigious ways."

Thus began Beatrice her song, and now,
As man who does not break his speech, she went
On with her saintly explaining to me: “Thou

Well know the greatest gift God ever lent
To human creatures, most to his large heart
And his goodness conformed; that most meant

To him, was the free will, of which take part
Not all the creatures, but those sole of wit
By him endow’d, and reason, from the start.

Now it is clear, if thou proceed from it,
The high value of a vow -which to be made
With the consent of self and God is fit-;

‘Cause, in drawing this pact, of what I said,
Free will’s treasure I mean, man victim makes
That by its own act its act forbade.

Hence what can be paid in its stead? Who takes
Back what was offer’d, to use it again,
Useful fruits from wrongful orchard shakes.

The most important point to thee is plain,
Thus; but since the Holy Church allows release,
Which seems to go against my discourse’s grain,

It behoves thee to sit some more, and please
Thyself with some more food, lest the hard bread
Thou ate cause thy digestion now to cease.

Open thy mind to what there will be fed
By me, and write it firmly down; for men
Know not, if not retaining what they ‘ve read.
In this compact two things convene: for, when
The sacrifice is well decided, still
Its object matter 's to be fixed then.

The promise shall never be cancel'd, till
It be kept; and the need of this outcome
Precisely in my words I tried to instil:

For this the Jews must needs have offer'd some
Sacrifice, even if the offered things,
Thou learnt, though changed could be still welcome.

The rest, whose name as 'object matter' rings,
Can well be such, that fault will be not found
If man to another kind properly it brings.

But no vow's burden man should shift around
Out of his own advice, without being freed
By white and yellow keys from what him bound;

And any change is foolish, take good heed,
Unless greater at least as six to four
Than the cast off is the new-vowed deed.

Thus, were the thing so weighty, no scale bore
Its load for outstanding value, such
Cannot be exchang'd, for none is valued more.

Ye mortals should not take your vows too much
Lightly: be of one word, and shun the unfair,
Mindful of what Jephthes thought apt to vouch,

When it would have been best to say 'Bad care
I took' than, keeping faith, do worse; and same
Foolishness shew'd the father of the fair

Iphigenia, made victim in the name
Of the Greeks' sake by him: by fool and wise
Wept alike for the unheard unholy claim.

Be slower, Christians, the vows' stake to apprize:
Don't be light as are feathers in the wind,
And don't deem any offer a right prize.

Old and New Testament you should keep pinn'd
In front of you; your shepherd should you lead:
Any other star will cause your hopes be thinn'd.

If bad covetousness attracts your heed
Otherwise, act as men, and not as sheep,
Lest laugh of you among you the Jews should need!

Don't be as lambs leaving the milk to seep
Undrunk from mother's teat, who wanton run
And, battling with themselves, fall in a heap!';

The words she spake here wrote I one by one.
She 's turning now, all filled with desire,
To the world's part enliven'd by the sun;
For her silence, and changes that transpire
From her semblance, my eager wits now shed
Wish to ask questions which persist to mire

My reason; as to hit the target sped
A dart ere the bow’s string is still’d for good,
Thus to the second realm running we’re led.

As in that heaven’s light my lady stood,
I saw her happy to a point so high,
To increase the planet’s own refulgent mood.

And if the star changed and smil’d, could I
Not be that more elated, since as man
I’m pliant to all change, not firm in sky?

As, when fell into a pond a thing that can
Resemble food, the fish, drawn by its scent,
Flock to it through the pure, still water’s span,

Thus saw I thousands of bright sheens all bent
To come to us, and each of them to say:
“Here comes who all our loves to increase is meant”.

And as each came to us, along the way
The spirit clearly appeared full of glee
In the brightened sheen’s livery of ray.

Think, reader mine, how it would want in thee
Further knowledge for vexing lack of writ,
Should I detail no more what I did see;

And from this thou can argue how my wit
Was anxious to hear from those their state,
As soon as from their sheen my sight was lit.

“O well-born soul, to whom grace granted fate
To see the Thrones of the triumph eternal
Ere of militant life thou pass’d the gate,

From the fire that within this sky supernal
Is spread, we’re set alight; therefore ask, should
Thou wish to know of us more than the external

Look.” From one of the pious spirits would
Come these words; and from Beatrice: “Ask now, ask
Assuredly, and their speech as God’s hold good”.

“Well do I see in thy light’s nest thou bask,
And that light from thy eyes proceeds, deem I,
For when thou smile is glittering this mask;

But I don’t know who thou can be, nor why,
Fair soul, thou hold the grade of this high sphere
Which other rays hide to men, when they try

To spot it.” Thus spoke I toward the clear
Light who’d address’d me earlier; for which he
Became much brighter than he had been ere.
As the sun by its own oft seems to be
Hiding for too great light, when are dissolv'd
By heat the vapours thick, so did I see,

For larger joy in its own ray involv'd,
Hide its bright self from me the holy thing:
He, thus tightly wrapp'd up, my desire solv'd

In the way my next Chant 's about to sing.
"When Constantine the eagle turn’d adverse
To the skies’ course, which she had run with him
Who wed Lavinia, as sung in Virgil’s verse,
Two hundred years and more on Europe’s rim
Took lair the bird of God, near to the land
From which she ’d come trailing Aeneas’ fate dim;
And she pass’d the world’s rule from hand to hand
In the shade of her sacred feathers till,
After these changes, to me went the command.

Caesar was I, Justinian named still,
Who wrung the excess and vain from the reign’s law,
Abiding by the felt first love’s high will.
And ere to this my deed my care I ’d draw,
My belief was that but one nature dwelt
In Christ, and naught beyond that faith I saw;
But the blessed Agapitus, who excell’d
As shepherd, steered me to true faith’s way
With the words which on my behalf he spell’d.
I trusted him; and lit by the clear day
Of his faith now I see the truth as plain
As false and true in contrast see thou may.
As soon as with the Church I walk’d, God fain
Was pleas’d to inspire with his high grace my toil
Of lawmaker, to which I gave all pain,
While I entrust’d my Belisar to foil
Enemies’ threat; and him the heaven’s right
Lent such aid, it bid me to spurn war’s spoil.
Well answer thy first question these words might;
But their trend needs requires that I should fill
Them with some thoughts that follow it by right,
So that thou see with what great reasons will
Contrast the sacrosanct sign all those men
Who usurp it or move arms against its sill.
See what large valour made it worthy den
Of reverence; and this dates from the day
Pallantes, dying, gave it a reign. And then
More than three hundred years, the stories say,
Till when the three and three held fight, it took
Its lair in Alba Longa, as thou know may;
Then under seven kings, narrates the book,
From the Sabines’ rape to Lucretia’s pain,
It won all folks that of near lands partook.
Thou knowst what it achiev'd, upheld by deign
Romans, contrasting Brennus, Pyrrhus and
Against so many another state or reign;

For which Torquatus, he who back to land
Went, named after his dishevel'd mane,
Decii, Fabii, all gain'd deserved stand.

It crush'd the pride of Arabs to the plain
With Hannibal descending the Alpine rocks
From which, Po river, thou derive thy lane.

Under it had their triumph, in youth's locks,
Scipio and Pompey; and to the hill thou were
Born below, it gave bitter pillage's knocks.

Then, near the time that heaven's will and care
Led to the world celestial calm, it take
Up with people's consent Caesar would dare.

Of what it did from Alps to Rhine long spake
Isère and Loire with Seine, and its deeds saw
Each valley which with waters Rhone swell make.

What it did after Caesar would it draw
Out of Ravenna, Rubicon to wade,
To retell any tongue or pen is raw.

Toward Spain it address'd the host, and made
Then for Durres, and hit Pharsalia such,
That even on warm Nile mourning was paid.

It saw again the Phrygian shores, to touch
The lands whence it had come, where Hector sleeps;
Then to Ptolemy its flight brought sorrow much.

Thence its lightning would strike at Juba's keeps,
And thence toward your west it turned, where
Pompey's trumpet was heard. And also weeps

For its deeds wick'd Cleopatra, who would dare,
To flee from its advance, her own death quest
From the colubers' horrid, sudden scare.

This did its next ensign, who laid to rest
Brutus and Cassius thou saw maul'd in Hell,
And put Perugia and Modena to test.

With him it ran until the red shore; well
In peace with him rested the whole world, so
That was shut Janus' temple in that spell.

But what, for mortal realms dwelling below
It, the sign I speak of had earlier done,
Or would in later times on them bestow,

Is dark and paltry thing, if it with one
Feat of this third of Caesars' thou compare
With a clear sight and feelings that pure run;
Because the vivid justice blowing fair
In me grant'd it, under the man I say,
The high honour to avenge its angry care.

Now wonder for the words which here I lay:
With Titus it ran on, of Man's old sin
The vengeance with a just revenge to pay.

And when the Lombard tooth would bite within
The Holy Church, under its mighty wing
Charlemagne ran in succour, them to win.

At last those thou can judge, whom of wrong thing
I had accus'd above, and held to account,
Who all your evils upon you do bring.

Some on the public sign try to surmount
With yellow lilies, some bend it to their
Side, so that 's hard to see whose is worst count.

Let Ghibelline after their art to care
Under another sign; for ill complies
With it man who does it from justice pare;

And let not this new Charles give it new tries
With his Guelph; but let him its talon fear,
That from much higher beast the hide unties.

Many a time did the sons shed bitter tear
For the guilt of their father, and don't trust
God to exchange his ensign for lilies' gear!

This small star is adorn'd throughout by just
Spirits who act'd for good in hope they might
Thus reap honour and fame; and when men's lust
Leans to such aim, astray from the true light,
It behoves that the rays of love divine
Mount toward heaven from their hearts less bright.

But that should our rewards be kept in line
With our deserts is part of our pure joy,
Seeing the scale not less, nor more to incline.

Hence such a sweet affection we enjoy
From live justice, it can never be bent
To any unfair intent, or any annoy.

As sweet notes by diverse voices are lent
To a song, in our life by diverse grade
Among these wheels sweet harmony is sent.

And within this clear pearl there shines the shade
Bright of Romeo, to whose unselfish deeds,
So great and fair, malicious wrong was made.

But the Provençal who wrong'd him, must needs
Stand laughless; and from this thou see bad way
Takes who from others' goodness his spite feeds.
Four daughters had, and each a queen could say,
Raymond de Béringer, and this effected
Romeo, a pilgrim of most humble stay.

And then the wicked tongues so him affected
That to an account he call’d this just, who then
For the ten gave him twelve to be collected.

Thence he took leave as poor old man; and when
The world should know with what stout heart he went
Crust to crust begging for his food and den,

More praise than given now to him were lent.”
Seventh Chant

“Hosanna, sanctus Deus sabaoth,
Superillustrans claritate tua
Felices ignes horum malacoth!”

Thus, turning to the note of which was doer,
Was seen by me to sing the light that spoke,
Doubly alight, lest one sheen to its fame be poor;

And he and the others, at a single stroke,
Mov’d, like supremely fast sparkles, away,
Veil’d by the sudden distance which they broke.

I was doubting; within myself I ‘d say
“Talk, talk!” to my dear lady, who my thirst
Quenches with her sweet words as none else may;

But that reverence which takes hold, at first
Hearing of her name’s syllables, of my
Wit, bent my head; nor speaking out I durst.

Little suffer’d the sleepy appearance I
Shewed, my lady; and she began, with rays
Of such a smile, happily I would defy

The fire: “According to what in me says
My unfailing advice, thy doubts concern
How punishment just vengeance justly pays;

But I shall solve thy doubt, so that discern
Thou may, listening, how the truth unties
-By gift of weighty words- this knot so stern.

To impose not to the virtue of will the ties
Which would have saved him, the unborn first man,
Damning himself, damned his seed to cries;

For which mankind lay ill along the span
Of centuries in noxious errors lost,
Until God’s Word was pleas’d to end the ban,

Descending where he join’d to himself, with most
Unique act of eternal love, our own
Nature, which far from him our guilt had toss’d.

Address thy mind to reason now; I ‘ve shown
That nature which was join’d to God, as it
Was creat’d, good and truthful stood alone;

But after its own deed it was then fit
From Paradise it should be bann’d, because
It veer’d away from true life and true writ.

Therefore the pain impart’d by cross, if close
Thou link it to the assumed nature, will
Be seen to bite with the most rightful cause;
At the same time naught was done with such ill
Offence, looking at him who suffer'd it,
To whom that nature was conjoined still.

A single deed into twain outcomes hit:
God and the Jews by the same death were pleas'd;
For it trembled the earth and heavens split.

Thy bafflement, therefore, should be surceas'd
If it is said that a just vengeance meted
Just court, when such hard pain's sentence releas'd.

But I see now thy mind bound and defeated,
From thought to thought, by a hard knot, so tight
It yearns to have this further doubt unseated.

Thou say: 'Of all just said I have clear sight;
But it 's hidden from me why God should choose,
For our redemption, but this painful plight'.

This decree, brother, 's buried to all whose
Intellect has not been matur'd within
The flames of love, that reason's bounds set loose.

However, so much effort is spent in
Looking at this, and so little is guess'd,
I 'll shew this was worth way to cleanse our sin.

Divine virtues, that from themselves divest
All spite, blazing within so brightly shine,
That beauty eternal is by them express'd.

What is from them distill'd by direct line
Has no end, since the imprint will never fade
Which their seals on created things enshrine.

What is from them by direct action made
Is wholly free, since it is not subjected
To influences which second causes bade.

More it conforms to them, and more affected
It pleases them; for the holy blazing, raying
On each, in more like things is more reflected.

Of all these dowries is enrich'd the fraying
Man's nature, which, should one of them not have,
It 's fit from nobleness be found decaying.

Only sin is the thing which makes it slave
And from supreme goodness dissembling; so,
Poorly reflected is the light this gave;

And far from native worth will ever go,
Unless, atoning for the void of guilt,
Against evil delight to pain it 'll bow.

Your nature, when with sin was wholly fill'd
In its primeval seed, was put in ban
From Paradise and from all worth instill'd;
Nor, if thou subtly ponder, could have Man Recover'd all of this in any way, Unless of these two crossings one he span:

Either should God benignly take away On his own, or by himself Man should Have discharged his folly, if he may.

Push now thy sight inside -for all it 's good- The abyss of everlasting counsel, and On my words, as thou can, intently brood.

Man could never, with means in his own hand, Discharge his guilt, for he could not go low -in humbly kept humility to stand-

As much as he 'd presum'd himself to blow; And for this reason was to him barr’d the way To atone for former sin through beaten brow.

Therefore it behov’d God salvation lay For Man, toward whole life, through God's own means, Either one, or them both, mark what I say.

But since the liking of the doer leans More to his deed the more this represents, Of his good heart, whence it issues, the sheens,

The divine goodness, that in all events Imprints itself, was pleas'd to raise you again Proceeding through all of its fair intents.

Nor either one of them did ever gain, Between first dawn and last sunset, so high And splendid trophy, or will in future deign:

For more largesse shews God to mankind, by Giving himself to make it fit to rise, Than if condoning sin in which Men lie:

And all other atonements lack in size Justicewise, unless God's Son would choose To abase himself in flesh that lives and dies.

Now to fulfil thy wish, I 'll say things whose Declaration already I made, to clear Their sense so that nothing of it thou lose.

Thou say: 'I see water and fire down here, With air and earth and all their mixtures, fall In a short time under corruption's spear;

And verily these things are creatures all; Therefore, if what was said is true, they should Be secure from decay's dissolving call'.

The angels, brother, and this haven good Where thou art, can be said to have been created, In their whole being, such as thenceforth stood;
But the elements earlier here stated  
And all things made from them, to take their cause  
From preexisting virtues must be rated.

Created was the matter of which those  
Are made; created were the forming mights  
In these stars that around them set and rose.

The rays and motions of such holy lights  
Are what draws out of their potential kinds  
The souls of brutes and plants that meet your sights;

But the goodness supreme directly binds  
In you the human souls, and makes these fall  
In love with it, so that it fills their minds.

And hence thou can well argue once for all  
Your resurrection, if thou think again  
How human flesh was made, when at God’s call

Both first parents their body and life did gain.”
Eighth Chant

It was the imperil'd world's faith to believe
That the fair Cyprus-born goddess would ray
Love from third sky, where she'd elect'd to live;

For which the ancient folks, in ancient way
Of error, not to her alone rais'd cry
Of vows, or sacrifice's honour would lay;

But to Cupid and Dione they render'd high
Worship, her mother this, and her son that
Who, they said, sat in Dido's lap; and by

Her name, which my beginning hinted at,
Was nam'd the star dallying with the sun
Now on its nape, and on its brow now, sat.

I perceiv'd not that into her sphere I 'd run;
But lent me firm belief that I was there
My lady's heighten'd beauty. And as one

Spark can be seen inside a flame, or fair
Voice amongst other voices can be heard,
Keeping the note while the others' trills off wear,

Thus saw I in that light other lights gird
That sky, with various speeds moving around,
Yielding, methinks, to what inside averr'd.

Never cold winds from cloud went down to ground,
Be they seen or unseen, with rush so fast,
That would have not been slow and tardy found

By whoever could see the lights there cast
Come to us in that sky leaving the sphere
Of the high Seraphs, where they 'd dwelt in past;

And inside those that first advanc'd we 'd hear
Sound "Hosanna" in such way, henceforth I
Never went without wish it 'd be sung near.

Then I saw one of them come closer by
Us, who alone then said: "At thy behest
Ready, to enhance thy joy all means we 'll try.

With the sky's Principalities no rest
We know in our spinning, of one spin
And one thirst with the spirits thou address'd:

'Ye whose intent moves the third sky within';
But we 're so full of love, that thee to please
Standing still equal pleasure shall us win."

After my eyes were offer'd, to ask ease
To speak, with awe to lady mine, and she
With her assent would assure and appease
Them, my gaze I address'd to him that me
So much had granted, and with great affection
Impress'd, I voiced: “Who are you, prithee?”

Then with what greater and refin'd perfection
Saw I that light shine, for increased glee
That accrued for my words to its complexion!

Thus transformed, he said: “The world had me
But a short time; had it been greater, much
Evil that 's bound to come, would never be.

My joy, that rays around and hides me, such
As living thing by silk cocoon all bound,
Puts me of thy knowledge wholly out of touch.

Thou lov'd me much - and good enough cause found,
For, had I lived still, I would have shown
How more than fronds could from my love redound.

That left bank, which to be lapp'd is known
By Rhone after with Sorgue it joins, as lord
Should I have ruled in due time; to own

Italy's horn would also Fate accord
Which Catona, Bari and Gaeta hem
From where the Tronto and Verde to sea ford.

Already on my forehead there shone the gem
Of the crown of that land which Danube's streams
Cross after from the German shores they stem.

And Sicily the fair, where haze oft gleams,
From cape to cape along that stretch of sea
That by Sirocco more perturbed seems,

For nascent sulphur -not Typhoeus!-, through me
Would have receiv'd its lords as straight offspring
Of Charles and Rudolph, lawful reign to see,

If misrule, that ever from bad king
Afflicts the subject folks, would not have brought
All Palermo with cries of 'Death!' to ring.

And, could foresight fit in my brother's thought,
His Catalanian servants' miser need,
Lest it offence bring him, avoid he ought;

For, in all truth, he should provide indeed
By himself or some else, that on his boat
So loaded no more load should be decreed.

His nature, that from liberal took note
Then of strict, could avail itself of such
Officers, that car'd not on gold to dote.”

“Since I believe, my lord, thou see as much
Clearly as I see myself, there where all good
Begins and ends, the joy my virtues touch
From thy words, all the more rejoice I should;  
And this to me is also endearing, cause  
Into God staring discern it thou could.

Thou made me happy, and in like way give pause  
To a doubt thy words inspir’d in me: how might  
Be that a bitter seed from sweet arose.”

These my words; and he then to me: “If bright  
Truth can I show, thou shall hold fully in front  
What now behind thy back is out of sight.

The good that all this realm thou mount is wont  
To turn and cheer, in these big bodies makes  
Its providence become virtues. And don’t  

Derive only their being, but their sakes  
Too with it, from the mind in its perfection  
Standing, the natures which the world’s kind takes:

For which all that this bow shoots, to direction  
Provided for shall fall, as come to aim  
Things led to their own sign by right affection.

Should this not be, the sky thy steps now claim  
Would well produce its effects, that not arts  
Could be, but rather downfalls to blame;

And this can’t be, unless the wits these parts  
Moving be wanting, and wanting the first,  
In that to them no perfection imparts.

Wish thou plainer this truth appease thy thirst?”  
And I: “No, I perceive it cannot be  
That what is needed Nature’s might may worst”.

For which again: “Tell now in truth,” said he:  
“For Man on earth would it be evil, should  
He lack citizenship?” “It’s plain to me.”

“And live among his likes Man ever could,  
If not by diverse tasks in diverse ways?  
Surely not, if your teacher’s writing ‘s good.”

Such had been until here his arguing’s trace;  
And then, summing it up: “It’s fit therefore  
From diverse root each man should find his place:

For which one Solon’s and one Xerxes’ bore  
Attitudes, one Melchisedec’s, one those  
Of him whose son in flight met ending sore.

The spinning skies, when proper seal they chose  
For mortal wax, aptly their office fill,  
But according to breed fail to dispose.

Hence it comes Esau, before birth e’en, will  
Depart from Jacob; and from such vile breed  
Comes Quirinus, from Mars he ‘s said to spill.
The generating Nature to each seed
Would ever a like path appoint, unless
Divine providence wins with its own lead.

What had been behind thee, I did redress
In front: but so that thou know well I care
Of thee, one more corollary I 'll address.

Nature ever, if fortune's unfit lair
Finds, bad results will give, as will give all
Seed fallen in a ground to it unfair.

And, should the world down there abide the call
Of the foundations Nature gives, it would,
Following them, make good folks of men all.

Instead, you bend to become clerk man good,
By his own trend, to gird a sword, and make
A king someone who 's fit to preach: thus stood

Often out of straight way the path you take.”
Ninth Chant

A
fter thy Charles, fair Clemence, had thus clear’d
My doubts, he went on telling the deceits
Which his seed would receive in times that near’d;
But said: “Don’t tell, and let go by years’ beats”;
So that I cannot say if not that tears
Justly shall follow your unloyal feats.

And that saint living light already appears
To have turn’d to the sun which ever fills
It, as good that all things with plenty endears.

Alas, deceived souls and impious wills,
Creatures who from such good divert your heart,
Aiming to what in you vanity instils!

And now I see coming toward my part
Another splendour, that with brighter shine
Wanted outside its wish to please impart.

Beatrice’s eyes, as earlier fix’d on mine,
With their endearing consent, made then me
Assured in the wish she did divine.

“Prithee, make that my quest soon sated be,
O blessed soul,” said I “and give me proof
Thou canst mirror my thought, with brighter glee!”

For which the light unknown to me, aloof
In its deep gleam, earlier a-ring with song,
Answer’d as soul to whom good deed is roof:

“In wretch’d Italy’s land there lies, among
Venice fiefs, betwixt Brenta and Piave springs,
A ground where gentle swellings roll along.

There a hill rises, not much tall, whence stings
Came of fierce flame descending to the plain:
He brought damage and ruin to all good things.

Of one root we were born up there, the twain
Of us; Cunizza was I call’d, and here
Shine for not bearing to this star disdain;

But joyfully I recall why in this sphere
I dwell; and that such cause does not annoy
Me, folks could deem a doubtful thing to hear.

Of the spirit resplendent in his joy
Nearest to me within this precious sky,
Great fame remains; and this he shall enjoy

Five times one hundred years more: thus shew I
To thee how it is fit for men to excel,
So that new life they lease after they die.
And of different thought are those who dwell
Between Adige and Tagliamento, nor
Repent they yet in spite of defeat’s knell;

But soon it ‘ll come to pass that Paduans, for
Being toward their duty rebel, stain
The waters of the bog Vicenza has fore;

And where Sile and Cagnan join their streams twain,
Someone lordly behaves with raised brow,
While is readied the net to him arraign.

And Feltro has to weep yet demeanour low
Of its bad shepherd, fault so foul with gore
That no man for the like was jail’d in stow:

Too capacious would be the bin to store
The blood of Ferrarese, and it would wear
Whomever of its weight should keep the score;

The blood, I mean, this courteous priest shall bear
As gift to befriend some; and gifts thus made
Are all too suited to what is wont there.

Mirrors are found above, Thrones by you said,
From which resplend to us judgments’ divine;
Thus these words come without malicious shade.”

Then was silent; the semblance of her shine
Made me aware she had turn’d elsewhere, to take
Her former place in the round dancing line.

The joyous thing there next, of whom she spake
So endearingly, was brought into my ken
As fair ruby whose colour sun’s rays wake.

Splendour is gain’d up there for joy, as when
On earth we laugh; while in deep Hell a shade
Grows darker as more gloom seeps in mind’s den.

“God sees all, and in him thy sight is made
To identify, o blessed thing of light,
So no thy wish can be denied;” I said:

“Thus why thy voice -which the celestial might
Gladdens with sounds of those saint blessed fires
Each of whom with six wings clads a pure sprite-

Failed to give answer to my desires?
Hardly would I wait thy requests, could I
Be inside thy thought, as mine thy mind inspires.”

“The greatest valley where water pours by”
Began at that his words “from the great sea
Ocean, which girdles all high lands and dry,

Between the opposed shores thou can well see
So much against sun’s course to stretch, one end’s
Meridian line, for the other end must be
The horizon. From the point where Magra rends
Tuscany from Liguria, to where flows
Iber, halfway my land therein extends.

Nearly the same sun’s rise and set endows
Bougie and my birthplace city, which had made
Its harbour warm with blood, as old tale shows.

By those folks who knew me, I was there said
Fulcus; and of my nature is this sky
Imprint’d, as its influx in life me bade;

Indeed, more did not burn from love than I
Belos’ daughter, Creusa and Sichaeus offending,
And such I was until ripe age came by;

Nor burned more Phyllis, when apprehending
Demophoon’s deceit, nor the hero strong
Who, to love Ioles, caused his own ending.

We don’t repent here up, but smile along
For the virtue that thus ordain’d and car’d,
Not for the erased memory of our wrong;

Here admire we the might laying unspar’d
Adornment, and discern through which high good
The above world’s look in nether things is air’d.

But, so that all thy wish here born thou should
Bring back full satisfied, it ’s fit that I
Somewhat further proceed to give thee food.

Thou wish to know who ’s this light shining by
So brightly near to me, sparkling around
As rays of sun from limpid water fly.

Learn now that there inside holds serene ground
Raab; and from her being to us conjoin’d
In highest grade is our sky’s nature found.

Rul’d by it, where Earth’s shadow ’s but a point,
She was called to Heaven first of all
The souls which Christ’s triumph did thus anoint.

Well was it fit to leave her in sky’s hall
As token of the high victory won,
With sores of the two palms, on the cross’ stall.

Indeed, she favour’d Joshua’s glory upon
The Holy Land, of which but little care
Seems to touch the holy father’s mind anon.

Thy town, whose root is from him who did dare
First turn his back on his maker, and feeds
So abundant plants of envy in its lair,

Turns out and spreads the accursed flower; needs
This led astray thy country’s lambs and sheep,
Having changed to wolf’s the shepherd’s heeds.
For this the Gospels, and the doctors deep
In doctrine, are neglected: but the book
Of law is worn, so much its study is steep.

After this pope's and cardinals' cares took:
And Nazareth, where Gabriel spread his wings,
Their thoughts, otherwise turn'd, wholly forsook.

But the Vatican and the elected things
Of Rome, where burial grounds are for the throng
That had followed Peter, from the stings

Of adultery shall be freed ere long.”
Tenth Chant

The first Value beyond all words, whose eyes
Are fixed on his Son with the Love flowing
From either one eternally, what lies

In front of human senses or man’s knowing
Made with such order, that no man can fail
To taste of him appraising all that’s showing.

Raise thus, reader, thy sight with mine, and nail
It to the spinning wheels, fixing the point
Where meets the day’s the year’s celestial trail;

And thy covetous heed should there be join’d
To the art of that master who inside
Loves it so, ne’er his sight can be disjoint

From it. See how from there is spread out wide
The slanting circle bearing planets round,
To respondent to the world that needs such ride:

Indeed, were not their path thus slanted found,
Many a celestial virtue would be in vain,
And nearly all virtue dead on earthly ground;

And, were their paths’ departure from straight plane
More or less, much in world’s order would be
Wanting, for earth’s and heaven’s sorry bane.

Now rest, reader, upon thy desk, and free
From care, thinking of what thou here assay,
If thou wish to feel not fatigue, but glee,

By thyself feed on what in front I lay;
For the subject of which I’m made scribe, bends
To it all heed of which dispose I may.

The greater world’s ordainer, that gives trends
To all nature with heaven’s virtue, whose
Light measures time for ev’ry soul who intends,

Join’d to the part above to name I choose,
Was turning in the coils wherein each day
Earlier dawn from nightly dark springs loose;

And within it was I; but naught I may
Of going up recall, if not as man
May feel first thoughts ere in the mind they stay.

Beatrice’s this escort of mine, who can
Lead me from good to better so much fast
That across time her deed seems not to span.

How much shining must be what I saw cast
Within the sun where I had just ingress’d!
Sun’s not their colour, but their light surpass’d.
Though all my wit, art and wont craft address’d,
I could not tell so, man could it conceive;
Faith, though, could lend, and such to see be press’d.

No wonder our fancy cannot weave
Image so excelling its low powers, ’cause
More than Sun’s sheen our eyes never perceive.

Thus there did his fourth family enclose
The high Father, who sates it in his ways,
Shewing how he gives birth and how he blows.

And Beatrice began: “Render now grace
And thanks to the angels’ sun who to this sun
Tangible, by his mercy, rais’d thy pace”.

Never was mortal heart so fast to run
With all its pious liking to set out
All its being to turn to the high One,

As to her words I made myself devout;
And all my love so in God was put, that my
Lady in oblivion faded, left without.

She was not hurt by this: a smile would lie
So brightly in her laughing eyes, their sheen
Made that, erstwhile but one, split up was I.

Alive lights winning sun’s, saw I, had been
Making centre of us, forming a crown,
To be heard sweeter than bright to be seen:

Thus at times, when the air is moist, here down
Leto’s daughter we see by vapours girt,
Her rays contain’d by them in shining gown.

In Heaven’s court, whence I return to dirt,
Many an endearing thing is found, and fair
So, outside of that realm they us desert;

And those lights’ song was one of these up there;
He who wears not feathers to fly that high,
Shall wait for a mute man such news to bear.

After such ardent suns, singing close by,
Had turned around us thrice, in their look
Like stars circling the steady poles nearby,

They act’d as women that in dancing shook
Till now, but listen then at a standstill,
And will not move until new notes they took;

From within one I heard new words then spill:
“Since the ray of God’s grace, by which is lit
True love, and which then grows, with love to fill,
Resplends in thee so multiplied, that it
Leads thee to mount the stairs of Heaven, whence
To descend not without new rise is fit,
Whoever should deny his wine, perchance,
To thy thirst, could not count himself as free
If not as stream in sea not finding stance.

Thou wish to know from what flowers can be
Adorn’d this garland, fondly set to lock
The fair woman to sky vouching for thee.

I was among the lambs of the saint flock
Which Dominick had led to pasture’s ground
Where they grow fat spurning vain things to stock.

This, who nearest to me at right is found,
Brother and teacher was for me, by name
Albert from Köln - I Thomas, born around

Aquinnus. Should to all others turn thy aim,
After my say steer round thy sight apace,
Running along this blessed ring of fame.

That other flare issues from smiling face
Of Gratianus, who helped either court
So much, he earn’d for that Paradise grace.

Peter, the next to adorn our choir, had pour’d
Into the Holy Church’s treasure his own,
As the poor woman did who so well scor’d.

The fifth light, that amongst us fairest shone,
Breathes such love, all the world down there is keen
To learn of him, whose fate is known to none;

Inside is the sharp mind, whose wit had been
Made so deep that, if true is true, one such
On earth was not, nor ever will be seen.

Next still thou see the candle flame that much
More than others, in living flesh, on role
And kind of angels with learn’d writ could touch.

Into that smiling smallish light next stole
The advocate of the Christian times, he whose
Latin avail’d not great Augustin sole.

If thou with mind’s insight to follow choose
My praising words passing from shine to shine,
Over the eighth thy wish now ’s hanging loose.

Therein enjoys seeing all good the fine
Saint soul who the world’s fallacies makes plain
To all who care to listen to his line:

The body he was divested from had lain,
Down on earth, in Ciel d’Oro; and he then came,
Exile and martyr, to this peaceful lane.

Further on thou see blazing the ardent flame
Of Isidore with Bede and Richard, who
In thinking more than man’s deserved name.
This one, from whom thy gaze returns back to
Myself, is the soul's light of man who in thought
Of grievous things seem'd tardy death to woo:

Sigieri's shine perpetual: he who sought,
Lector in Rue du Fouarre, to syllogize
Truths that envies and hates to him then brought."

Thereafter, as a clock that, when will rise
God's bride to sing to spouse the morning song
Would call the faithful, chiming at sunrise,

That some parts pull and others push along,
Sounding "tin tin" with note so sweet, that swell
With love the souls to whom good thoughts belong;

Thus did the glorious wheel of which I tell
Move and exchange voices with voices, sweet
In notes and timbre so, that 's not known well

If not where souls eternal joy shall meet.
O mortal wits' senseless affections, how
Defective are those syllogisms that make
Your wings beat in pursuit of some base vow!

After law suits someone, others to take
Up medicine, some after priestly state
Were going; some the crown by force to rake
Or by guile, and their kinghood thus to instate;
And more were bent on thieving, or on deals
Of civic life; many occupied to sate

Carnal lusts; lazing those whom toil repeals,
When, free from all these things, Beatrice and I
Were in Heavens amongst such glorious peals.

After the lights had all come back, each by
The exact point of the ring where ere had been,
They stood still, as in holders candles lie.

And I heard, within that resplendent sheen
Who earlier had spoken, begin now
A speech, while to become brighter 'twas seen:

“As I shine from the eternal light, so how
And whence are mov’d thy thoughts, looking in it
I can learn, even ere voice them dare thou.

Doubts are besieging thee, and yearns thy wit
That be repeat’d in open speech and clear
My words, to thy own mind to make those fit,

When I said: ‘Where they can grow fat’ and near
That, where I said: ‘The equal did not rise’;
And it is good to make distinctions here.

The providence -that rules the world with wise
Counsel in which every creature’s sight
Finds, ere fathoming it fully, its demise-
So that the bride of him, who bridal rite
Made of his blessed blood with clamours high,
Could proceed toward her bridegroom by right

Assured in herself, more feal to lie,
Ordain’d two princes in her favour, such
That on both counts could guide her by and by.

One with seraphic ardour blazed; much
Shone with cherubic light for wisdom, down
On earth, the other, as men’s lore can vouch.

I shall talk but of one, ‘cause giving crown
Of prize to one, no matter whom, one says
Of both, whose deeds all led toward this town.
Between Tupino and the waters their ways
Finding downhill from blessed Ubald's seat,
A fruitful slope of high mountain there stays,

Whence to Perugia are wont to come both heat
And cold, from the Sun's door; and on rear side
Nocera takes, with Gualdo, tearful beat.

From this slope, where it shews a less steep ride,
Was born a sun to all mankind, as bright
As that rising whence Ganges' streams abide.

Therefore he who makes mention of this site
Not 'Assisi', which too little would mean,
But 'East' should say, if willing to say right.

He had not yet much time in your world been,
When he began to make the earth feel some
Solace of his great virtues, ere unseen;

'Cause he, still young, to a wedding wish'd to come,
Running into his father's war, which men
Hardly -as they do for death- ever welcome;

Till the time, before his town's bishop, when
Within his father's sight he wed such bride;
From day to day he lov'd her more since then.

She, depriv'd of her first husband, aside
Had lain eleven hundred years and more
Despis'd and sombre, till he took her side;

Not it avail'd her fame the wide-heard lore
Of her lying with Amiclates secure
When he whom all world fear'd knock'd at her door;

Nor it avail'd with brave firmness to endure,
So that, when Mary stood at the cross' feet,
To weep on it with Christ love would her lure.

But, so that of all darkness I be neat,
Poverty and Francis in my words shalt thou
Intend, should of these lovers mention meet.

Their concord and glad semblance, the way how
They wonder'd at each other in love's hook
Were cause of many a saintly thought and vow;

So much so, that the blessed Bernard shook
Off his shoes first, and ran after such peace
And, running, fear'd lest slow his course should look.

O fertile good! O the unknown richness' bliss!
Giles and Silvester shake off shoes and run
Behind Francis, such fair bride not to miss.

Then the father and teacher new way spun
With his bride and that family, which tied
Already the humble string that made them one.
Nor could his heart by cowardice be shied
Either for being of Peter Bernard son,
Or for seeming from spite wondrously dyed;
But with princely dignity he took on
Innocent on his own new order, which
He obtain'd at last the Pope's first seal upon.

After the poorish herd had grown, in hitch
Behind him whose life's wondrous deeds would sound
Better in angels' choirs with glorious pitch,
The saintly wish of its shepherd was crown'd
A second time: by the Holy Ghost's inspir'd,
To its glory Honorius' writ did thus redound.

Then, martyrdom by him being desir'd,
He went to preach in Sultan's presence proud
Christ and the others by the same faith fir'd;
But found to be convert'd unripe that crowd,
And, not to waste in vain pursuit his time,
Again to fruitful Italy's lands aloud
Preached; and on the stone of hard raw climb
Between Tiber and Arno he took the last
Seal, of which for two years his limbs bore prime.

When God, who him to such good deeds had cast,
Was pleas'd to draw him up to the reward
He had deserv'd choosing to be downcast,
To his brothers, as to right heirs, in ward
He gave his dearest woman, and them bade
To love her with full fealty and concord;
And from her lap the illustrious soul he made
To be mov'd, to return to his truthful reign,
Nor wished for his body a coffin laid.

Think at last how was worthy he, who such main
Companion was to keep in stormy sea
Peter's vessel aim'd at true haven and gain;
And such our patriarch is seen to be;
Therefore whoever follows his command
Is loading worthwhile wares, thou canst well see.

But his herd to new food stretches greedy hand,
So that it cannot be it won't be spread
Through diverse woody cliffs in savage land;
And the more are the sheep far from him led
In vain wanderings, more will they return
Milkless to those whom they should feed instead.

It 's well true that some sheep fear damage's burn
And gather round the shepherd; but so few,
A small bolt into all their clothes could turn.
Now if my words were not hoarse, and if true
Attention thou did lend to what was said,
Should thou recall my speech to mind anew

Thy wish shall be partly contented made,
Seeing whence it ’s split our tree, and seeing why
My phrase with these definite words was laid:

‘Where they grow fat, unless truth they belie’.”
Twelfth Chant

A
s soon as the bless'd flame had come to say
The last word of his speech, the saint grindstone
Began to spin around, ceasing its stay;
And a whole turn had not yet spun alone,
When a new ring came, circling it, to play
With the first, spin for spin and tone for tone,
With hymn winning as much our poets' way
And our siren's song in those sweet sounds,
As direct sheen wins the reflected ray.

As curve out of soft cloud the double rounds
Of parallel rainbows wearing the same
Colours, when Juno's maid our eyes astounds
-That born from the inner ring the outer came,
As the voice of the vagrant nymph who, by
Love worn, as mist by sun, took Echo's name-
Thus making the earthly folks assured lie,
For the covenant God with Noah made,
They won't again by floods be drown'd and die;
Thus revolv'd around us, in twin crowns laid,
The everlasting roses; thus replied
The outer ones to those which inside stay'd.

After the joy and the great feast beside
Both of singing and blazing, this and that
Light with rejoicing light soothingly tied,
-Just as it comes the eyes by pleasure lur'd
Shut and raise lids, best the lure to look at-
From one of the new lights, deep there immur'd,
A voice was sent, that made me turn to it
As to its star the compass turns assur'd;
"The love" it said "by which my beauty is lit
Draws me to speak of the other leader, since
So well of mine herein to speak was fit.

With one name the other name fittingly dins:
It 's apt, for they together fought, as one
The splendours of world's prides their glory wins.

Christ's army, that so high a cost had run
To be armed anew, behind the lead
Mov'd tardy and thin, by doubting overrun,

When the ever reigning king met their sore need
Their compromis'd fortunes redressing, not
For their deserts, but by his sole grace's deed;
And, as was said, went to succour the lot
Of his spouse through two champions, after whose
Acts and words the stray'd folks right bearings got.

There whence comes the sweet Zephyr, prying loose
The sprouting of new fronds, from which is seen
Europe again its verdant clothes to choose,

Not much far from the pounding waves between
Which, tired for its long-run course, to man
The sun some time each year will hide its sheen,

Sits Calaruega lucky, wherein can
The folks avail of the protecting shield
In which one lion lay, one rampant ran.

In it was born the fierce lover to wield
The sword for Christian faith, the saint athlete
Raw to his foes, to his friends benign to yield.

And, as soon as created, was replete
So much his mind of divine virtue, his own
Mother made, still in her, prophecy's seat.

After perfecting, at the holy fountain's stone,
His wedding with the truthful faith, wherein
Mutual salvation's pledge and gift was shown,

The woman who the assent for him gave in
Saw in her dream the amazing fruit that would
Be born from him, and those his heirs would win.

And, so that as he was his name ring should,
An inspiration from this heaven came
So him to be all God's hold most plainly stood.

Dominick he was call'd; and my words frame
Him as the peasant once elect'd by Christ
To help him in the work his orchards claim.

Well did he appear herald and kin of Christ;
Indeed, the first affection in him shewn
Was for the advice given foremost by Christ.

Many a time he was found awake and strewn
On the bare ground, in silence, by his nurse,
As if saying: 'For this my wood was hewn'.

O father Felix' name really terse!
O Joan really fit as mother's name,
If its meaning is not to the use adverse!

Not for the world, where all men's heed now claim
Ostiensis and Thaddeus, but out of much
Love of the real manna, he achiev'd the fame

In little time of a great scholar, such
That he began to make his rounds to guard
The vines that wither for bad peasant's touch.
And from the throne that once was less ill-starr'd
Toward the justly poor -not for its guilt,
But for whom sits on it, by error marr'd-

He asked not to dispense less than bill'd,
To acquire first vacant benefits, to have
Tithes by which paupers’ needs should have been fill'd;

But he asked against all errant knave
To be allowed to fight, for the seed that
To the twain dozens girding thee root gave.

Then with hard will and doctrine he went at
His apostolic office’s duties, swift
As torrent which high water stream begat;

And he struck into heretic brambles’ rift
With all his might, made all the stronger where
The rebels would their standard higher lift.

Issued from him not a few rills then were,
Which all through the Catholic orchard run,
Making healthier the sprouts that are grown there.

If of the Church’s chariot such was the one
Wheel, when her civil war she had to fight
In defence against those who could her stun,

Well should be manifest for thee the bright
Excellence of the other wheel, extoll’d
So much by Thomas ere I join’d his light.

The furrow where this high wheel’s rim had roll’d
Is, however, abandon’d, alas!, so
That in the argol’s place mildew grows bold.

His family, that straight had mov’d to go
Behind his steps, so far stray’d from right way,
That where the heel should be is now the toe.

And soon it shall be seen what harvest may
Come of such evil farming, when the rye
Shall complain that the barn is full of hay.

Should man search leaf for leaf, I can’t deny,
A page could still be found in Francis’ book
Reading: ‘What I was wont to be, am I’,

But neither from Casale, for sure, took
Such, nor from Acquasparta: made the writ
Looser the one, stricter the other look.

Bonaventura’s soul am I, now split
From Bagnoregio mine: in weighty roles
To postpone worldly cares always thought fit.

Illuminato is here, of those whose soles
Went shoeless, with Augustin: they ’re the poor
Girt by the string, whom God’s friendship consoles.
Hugh from Saint Victor here with him shines fore,
And Peter Eater, and his Spain’s namesake
For his twelve books resplendent in your lore;

Nathan the prophet and Donatus take
With Anselm and Chrisostomos their place;
The second toil’d for the main teaching’s sake.

On my left side the last two sheens now face:
Raban with Joachim, abbé on Calabrian land,
Who down there of prophetic fame left trace.

To praise so great a champion made me stand
Forward the inflamed brother Thomas’ kind
Spirit, with the wise words he call’d at hand;

And so was mov’d this company behind.”
He who 's bent on intending well what I
Now saw, should feign in mind -and keep the image,
While I 'm speaking, as rock steady to lie-

Fifteen stars, such as spread across sky's cage
Enliven of great clarity the air,
Winning battles with them thick vapours wage;

To these he should then add the seven fair
Lights that hold night and day our sky's north part,
So the world's axis' turning they don't care;

Then add the last two stars of the small Cart,
As mouth of horn whose lipspiece is the end
Of the shaft around which sky's motions start;

And all these stars, dear reader, now pretend
To make two garlands such, as Minos' lass
Made when a mortal frost did death portend;

And, had spokes the two wheels, those spokes to pass
Through a common centre, and the wheels rotate
With spins mutually seen in mirror's glass:

A much imperfect shade will this create
Of the true constellation and twin dance
Going around the point where I kept wait;

Because all this so much exceeds our glance
As the slow-flowing Chiana's stream is late
To the skies that with greater speed advance.

Not Apollo, nor Bacchus, celebrate
The blessed' songs, but three persons in one
Divine nature, one join'd to the human state.

The song and dance complet'd their measur'd run;
Then those saint lights turned to us their heeds,
Of new task happy as of the one just done.

Now the same light that of the wondrous deeds
Of the pauper of God had told the tale,
Broke the silence of those, whom concord leads:

"Since the first hay is beaten, and on scale
Is weighted the first harvest" said "I 'm led
By sweet love to take thee on further trail.

Thou think that in the breast from which was shed
A rib to bring to life the alluring cheek
Whose palate's greed cost so much to have fed,

And in that other wounded breast, whence weak
Men so much for all past and future gain
-For no guilt to outweigh its gift could seek-,
All that the human nature can attain
Of enlightenment, but in them was wrought
By the high virtue that creat’d the twain;
And therefore what I said keeps thee in thought,
For I affir’m’d no one to him be peer
Whom within the fifth sheen thy sight has caught.

To what I now ’ll reply thy mind’s eyes steer,
And thy belief and my saying thou ’ll know
Around truth’s centre equally to veer.
The things that die, or die cannot, all grow
As splendours of the first idea our Sire
Begets by his own loving’s mighty blow:

For that bright light moving from its first fire
Without becoming other thing, nor split
From the love that between them holds third tier,

After his goodness all the rays from it
Radiating mirrors into nine cohorts,
Forever though one unto itself will sit.

Then downward it descends to lower sorts
Of creatures, changing all along the way
Until it comes to transient things’ last ports;

And these transient occurrences I say
Be the things generated, which the sky
Seedlessly, or from seeds, produce well may.

Their wax and what stamps it are not laid by
In unique manner; for which less or more
Under the seal divine translucent lie.

From this it comes that trees oftentimes bore,
Though of one root, fruits of good or bad kind;
And you are born with wits’ different store.

Should the wax be made soft enough, and find
The sky’s virtue unsurpassed, would the seal
Then show in full the splendour of its mind;

But Nature always gives diminish’d feel,
Working as artists do, when of their hand
The shakings art’s good inclination steal.

But if warm Love imprints first valour, and
Directs its sight unclouded, all perfection
Shall be gained by things thus made to stand.

Thus was earth’s life made worthy, when election
Was given to the living creatures’ king;
Thus made the Virgin pregnant God’s affection;

So thy opinion may be prais’d, no thing
Ever has been, nor in all times will be,
Such as in those two persons God did bring.
Now, should I not further proceed, ‘How he, Solomon, could be peerless?’ would begin
Thy words, nor would thy doubt be solv’d by me.

But, so that be made clear what ‘s hid within
My former speech, take heed who was that king,
And what, when told to ask, he chose to win.

Not so darkly my earlier words would ring,
That thou could not well see he ask’d right wit
To be grant’d, for his high office, apt wing;

Not about the angels’ number to be lit,
Nor to know whether from two premises, one
Contingent, absolute the other, ‘s fit

Strict truth to draw, nor even if not run
A prime mover exists, nor if not right
Triangles in half circles finds someone.

Therefore, if what I said and this thou ‘ll bite,
Thou shalt learn that a king’s prudence was meant
By what I call’d an unsurpassed sight;

And if thou take clear heed of the content
Of words ‘he rose’, thou shalt see it concerns
But the kings, who are many, and few well bent.

With this proviso now thy mind discerns
My meaning, and can well agree thy thought
With what on Christ and Adam thy soul learns.

Thus to proceed with leaden feet thou ought,
So that thou move slow steps, as tired man,
In saying ‘aye’ or ‘nay’ with care well sought:

For he who undiscerningly ‘yes’ can
Utter, or ‘not’, whichever may be right,
Takes lowest stand amidst the fool men’s clan;

‘Cause it happens that current belief quite
Wrongful turn often takes; and feelings bind
Man’s wit, which cannot, thus, achieve clear sight.

Worse than in vain sets sail who wants to find
The truth without the proper tools: he ‘ll stain
With error, worse than blindness, his own mind.

And of this in the world are seen proof plain
Parmenides, Melissos, Bryson and
The many who, not knowing where, in vain

Proceeded: thus with Arius thou see stand
Sabellius and the fools who the Holy Writ
Twisted, as bent image bad mirrors hand.

And the folks should with prudence rein their wit
In judging, as the men who assess the wheat
In the field ere the time to reap is fit:
For I saw for all time of snow and sleet
The prickle show a dismal face and bleak,
Then bear on top the rose at the first heat;

And vessels did I see much fast and sleek
Sail all their course safely on open sea,
Only to founder on most tranquil creek.

Beware lord Jim and lady Meg to see
Into the divine counsel, by mere sight
Of theft or of good deed in man to be;

For this can fall, and that can rise by right.”
Fourteenth Chant

From centre outward, or from rim to centre,
Runs water in a round vessel, in it
Should on the inside a blow, or outside, enter:

This very image fell soon into my wit
When from the outer ring ceased to expound
The glorious Thomas' soul shiningly lit:

And such simile to unfold still more I found
From his and Beatrice's words, when she
Was pleased after him thus first to sound:

“This man has need -but yet to tell fails he
Either with voice or unexpressed thought-
Of further truth the hidden root to see.

Tell him whether with you forever ought
To stay as it is now this very light
Which to your substance such a blossom brought;

And, if this is the case, tell how this bright
Sheen can avoid, after you take again
Visible body, offending your new sight.”

As, by greater rejoicing drawn, will fain
At times those that in round are dancing raise
Their voice and cheer their acts with glee most deign,

Thus at the entreatng words and devout prays
Shew'd a rekindl'd joy the holy rings,
By new turns and by sung wonderful praise.

Those who complain that to behold such things
Man has to die, have yet to feel and see
How the everlasting rain its comfort brings.

The ever living one and two and three
Who reigns ever as three and two and one
Not bound, but encompassing all that be,

Was sung in tunes that for three times were run
By those spirits, with melody so sweet,
That it as a just prize no worth would shun.

And then I heard within the divine sheet
Of the inside circle's light a tranquil voice,
Methinks such as was heard at Mary's feet,

Answer: “As long as we shall thus rejoice
In Paradise, that long our love will ray
Around this garment clothing all our joys.

Its clarity after ardour takes; the way
Of ardour is through vision, large as far
As grace favours deserts in proper pay.
As soon as we receive from holy star
Our glorified new flesh, our persons more
Fair shall become, for them no want will mar;

For which in us will grow the light brought fore
By the unsurpassed good, the light of grace,
Enabling us to see its inner core;

Whence it behoves the vision grow apace,
And grow the ardour taking from it fire,
And grow the light radiating from our face.

But as live coal feeding the flame in pyre
For its vivacious shine flame’s blaze exceeds,
Thus defending its visible attire,

So this sheen girding us shall be won needs
In outlook by the splendour of the flesh
That till now, buried, the earth’s worms yet feeds;

Nor ill could all this light our senses enmesh;
For the new bodies’ limbs shall be made strong
To bear all things that can our soul refresh.”

Then seem’d to me fast and alert in song
To say “Amen!” both choirs, by which they shewed
Clearly how much for the dead bodies they long:

Less, methinks, to behold themselves renewed
Than to meet their lov’d parents and dear ones,
As they were ere to eternal blaze accrued.

And lo!, all round is seen a flame that runs
Over what there already spark’d, of even
Sheen, as horizon which new dawning stuns.

And as, when night’s dark shadows gain uneven
Hold of the heights, man’s eye sees and sees not
New things beginning the blue sky to enleaven,

Thus seem’d to me therein new beings I got
To behold, on the outside of the two rings,
Who ran around exchanging spot with spot.

O true sparkling of Holy Ghost’s own things!
How they appear’d sudden and blinding to
My eyes that, won, balk’d at such brightness’ springs!

Beatrice’s laughing beauty, though, would woo
My heart so much, that it is best to leave
Her memory with sights my verse can’t do.

From this my eyes could gain at last reprieve,
So I rais’d them again; and saw we ‘d been,
My lady and I, brought higher state to achieve.

The red star with a fiery ruddy sheen,
Redder than wont, shone, letting me perceive
That from a higher point by me was seen.
With all my heart and with those words that live
Within each man, to God myself I pledged,
As new grace it behov'd me to receive.

And was not yet out of my breast all dredged
This offer's ardour, when I got to know
My sacrifice had been gladly acknowledged;

For such a bright and ruddy light did show
Two lines crossing each other, that I said:
“O Helios, how dost thou adorn this glow!”

As by small and large lights appears inlaid,
Between the poles of sky, the whitish stream
Of Milky Way, giving wise wits doubt's shade;

Thus spark-bestrewn deep inside Mars did seem
Those rays, disposed in the august sign
A circle's quadrants make with joining seam.

Here my memory wins all craft of mine;
For on that cross I saw to blaze forth Christ,
To whom no deign compare can I assign;

But he who takes his cross and follows Christ,
Well can excuse my leaving this aside,
When he will see the white outburst of Christ.

From top to bottom and from side to side
Sparkles were running, lively blinking when
They met and pass'd beyond in constant glide:

Thus on earth straight or slanting in our ken,
Slow or fast, ever changing, can be seen,
Long time or short, the smallest things by men

Oberv'd to move along the ray whose sheen
Pierces at times the shade that folks have made
With crafty means, the solar glare to screen.

And as the lute with harp, in tautly laid
Harmony of many strings, sweet jingle make
For someone not intending the tune play'd,

Thus from the lights there shining spread the wake,
Along the cross, of melodies that would
Enrapture me, who their sense could not take.

Well perceiv'd I that a high praise there stood,
For came to me the words ‘Rise now!’ and ‘Win!’,
As to whom, hearing, not all intend could.

I was so enamour'd by the sound therein,
No thing I 'd seen or heard till then had bound
My wit with bonds so sweet as the holy din.

Perchance my words too daring seem to sound,
In postponing to tell the pleasure gave
Me the fair eyes where all my rest is found;
But who can see those beauties’ seals to have
More lively power in each higher sphere,
And I had turn’d not yet to them, can save

Me from the sin which I ‘m recanting here
Only to clear myself, the truth to say;
For the holy pleasure is not held less dear

When, mounting higher, straighter feelings play.
**Fifteenth Chant**

Benign will, into which ever evolves
The love that flows straight to good aim and true,
As greed itself into evil will resolves,

Made fall silent the lyre’s sweet sound anew,
As quiet all the strings thereof, by hand
Of heavenly musician pluck’d, mute grew.

How could to Man’s just prays deaf ever stand
Those substances who foster’d my deep will
To pray them, making silence in their land

As one? Well ’s fit eternal sorrow fill
All those who of that love themselves divest
For love of things outlasting not time’s mill.

As through serene pure skies from east to west
From time to time there shoots a sudden spark,
Drawing man’s gaze away from erstwhile rest,

As if a star chang’d place across the dark,
Were it not that there whence it took its flight
Naught is missing, and it lasts but a wink stark;

Such ran to the cross’ foot, down from its right
Arm, a star which had seemed to make part
Of that resplendent constellation bright;

Nor did that gem from its own band depart,
But slid along the radial paths, with look
Of rays that under alabaster dart:

Thus Anchise’s pious shade a swift course took
When in Elysium unexpected met
His son, if faith we lend to the great book.

“O my blood, o grace overflowing, let
By God on thee, to whom, as to thee, have
Twice ever open Heaven’s doors been set?”

Thus spake the light, for which my heed I gave
To him; then to my lady I turn’d my sight,
Nor could both times I from high wonder save

Myself: for in her eyes burn’d such a bright
Smile, that I thought with mine I plumb’d the abyss
Of grace that grant’d to me Paradise’s flight.

Then, in words as in sight most pleasing, this
Soul added things, at the beginning, deep
So, that I could ne’er have intended his

Meaning; nor used he by choice such steep
Speech, but he must, because his concepts were
Higher than what in mortal minds can seep.
And when the tension of the burning care
Had been so slacken’d, that the speech down wended
To the mark of what mortal wits can share,

The first words that by me could be intended
Were: “Blessed thou, threefold and one, thus casting
Courtesy on the seed from me descended!”

And he went on: “A welcome and long fasting,
Drawn from the reading of the grandest book
Where black and white are for all aeons lasting,

Was ended by thee, son, in me whose look
Is now this light that speaks, thanks to her who
Lent feathers to the lofty flight thou took.

Thou think that all thy thoughts are coming to
Me from him who is first as, once is known
One, five and six and seven are known too;

Thus thou art asking not which is my own
Name, nor why in this joyous crowd thee, more
Than the others, with joy greet I alone.

Thou thinkest right; because those to the fore
As lesser ones among these blessed, see
In the mirror where thoughts are spread before

Being thought; but so that the thirst in me
Burning of the saint love in which I wake
Eternally, better fulfilled be,

Thy voice assured, bold and joyous make
Cry out aloud thy will, thy desire cry
To which my answer ’s ready for thy take!”

I turned then to Beatrice; ere I
Spoke, she had heard, and smil’d to me an assent
Which made my desire’s wings even more spry.

Then I began: “The love and wit which went
In you as the first equality appear’d,
Were made of a same weight and same content,

‘Cause the sun that then lighted you, and sear’d,
With clarity and with heat, so equal traits
Has, that no likeness can to this be near’d.

But love and wit in us are spread by fates,
For reasons manifest to you, in degree
That make their wings lack equal feathers’ weights;

For which I, as a mortal, such decree
Of diversity feel, and thus can strive
But with love to thank your paternal glee.

Well do I beseech thee, topaz alive
Who adorn this precious jewel with thy sheen,
That thou sate with thy name my hunger’s drive.”
“O my frond in whom I, though I have been
Waiting so long, took pleasure, I ’m thy root”:
Thus began the reply of the august dean.

Then he told me: “He from whom first took foot
Thy house, who turn’d one hundred years and more
The first ledge of the mountain, is not moot
To have been my offspring and thy seed’s core;
It behoves by thy deeds shorter be made
His long toil, lifting weights till now he bore.

Florence, within her old wall-girdled glade,
Where still the Badia bells the town’s hours chime,
Peacefully in demure moderation bade.

Neither armlet nor crown shew’d in that time,
No frieze gown, no richly adorned belt
With which more than with worth the esteem would rhyme.

The daughter’s birth not yet as fearful felt
Was by the father; for by dowry and age
He was not out of fair limit compell’d.

Each mansion was not yet an empty cage;
Sardanapalus there had not yet shown
How in the bedroom barren lust can rage.

Your mount Uccelatoio had not outgrown
Rome’s Montemario - though the former will
Again outrun the latter when downblown.

I saw Belliccion Berti leave his sill
With leather and bone belt, and his wife would
In front of mirror paint on face not spill;
And those of Neri and Vecchio well then could
Go simply clad with unadorned skin,
While women were at flax and spindle good.

O lucky ones! Each could confide firmly in
Her sepulchre, and to none the foreign land
Of France the bridal bed could ever win.

As one stood vigil at the cradle, and
Used to calm her child with the words that
Fathers and mothers first to children hand,

The other, busy with her distaff at
Spinning, of Troy, of Fiesolans and Rome
Fabled while with her family she sat.

Such wonder would appear then to all some
Cianghella, or Lapo Salterello, as now
Cornelia or Cincinnatus rare would come.

To such an unperturb’d, fair living how
Our citizens then had, to such a sweet
Hostel my trustful city would endow,
Gave me Mary, call'd by high cries; I 'd meet
In your old Baptistry Christ's faith, and there
Of Cacciaguida name's receiv'd the treat.

Moronto and Eliseo my brothers were:
My woman from Po valley to me came;
Her surname did thine own thenceforth share.

I follow'd then emperor Conrad's fame;
And he in his army ordained me as knight,
So much for my good deeds he esteem'd my name.

I went off in his ranks to affront and fight
The wickedness of laws whose folks, by guilt
Of your shepherds, usurp your saintly right.

Here was I by those spiteful people's hilt
Loosen'd free from the world's fallacious tie
Whose love defaces many a soul well built;
Martyrdom gain'd this peace for me on high."
Sixteenth Chant

paltry Man's nobility of the blood,
I 'll wonder nevermore that thou can make
Our souls be proud where feeble feelings bud,

On earth I say; for in the sky, where fake
Aims can't divert Man's appetite, it came
To pass that in thy gleam false pride I 'd take.

Easily is cut the mantle of thy fame,
So that, if day by day new cloth 's not spun,
Time's shears shall make its hem all shorn and lame.

My words with 'you' were henceforth begun,
As was custom in Rome, ere new mores won
That made their speech less in such word to run;

For which Beatrice, who stood farther on,
Look'd, by her smiling, like the lady who
At Guinevere's first fault coughed anon.

I began: "My first root I gaze in you;
You give me voice to speak open and bold;
You raise me so, above myself I grew.

My mind fills up with joy through rills untold,
Till it rejoices unto itself to bear
Without breaking such pleasures as unfold.

Tell me now, my dear root, what people were
Your ancestors, and in which years took place
Your birth and childhood in my land; and there

Within Saint John's sheepfold's beloved space
Tell me how many dwelt, and who had been
Therein the men worthy of exalted grace."

As under blowing winds brightens the sheen
Of live coal in a flame, thus there saw I
At my kind words that light become more keen;

And while fairer was shewn before mine eye,
With sweeter, softer voice -but not in this
Modern language of ours- it said thereby:

"Between the day 'Ave' was sung in bliss
And when my mother, now a saint, bore me,
Reliev'd of long fatigue in my birth's peace,

This fire's orbs led it round and round, to be
Back under Lion's paw flaring again,
Five hundred eighty times. And thou could see

My own and my old folks' birthplace just lain
At the last ward's beginning, amongst those
Who run the yearly race for the flag's gain."
Suffice what of my folks to say I chose;
Who they were and whence they had come, is fair
Aside to leave, more than in words disclose.

All men who in my time were breathing air,
Of an age to bear arms, within the walls,
Were but a fifth of those who now live there.

But, while a Florentine himself now calls
Man come from Campi or Figline, pure then
Was the breed of craftsmen whose rank last falls.

O how better would be, were those folks’ den
Your neighbourhood, and had your bounds been set
At Galluzzo and Trespiano, and not those men

To have inside, nor have the stink to abet
Of Aguglione’s yeoman, nor of one
From Signa, whose keen eyes to barter fret!

If the breed who in the world astray more run
Had not been a stepmother to the Empire,
But, as to a son, motherly cares had spun,

Some that now deal and change under the spire
Of Florence, would in Semifonte dwell,
Where their fathers had gleaned twigs for fire;

Montemurlo to Conti still could well
Belong; under the Cerchi Acone still
Would stay, and Valdigreve under the spell

Of Buondemonti. From folks’ mixing spill
The troubles of your towns, as from the food
That ’s added in excess health’s troubles will

Ensue; and sooner falls, blinded by hood,
A bull than a blind lamb; and oft one blade
Five swords’ assault with sharper cut withstood.

Should thou look at how dim did Luni fade,
And Urbs Salvia, or how behind those two
Chiusi with Sinigaglia waste are made,

It shall not seem a thing of much ado
To hear how human breeds are undone fast,
Since even towns shall meet their ending too.

Your things all have their death finally cast,
As your persons; but life’s shortness is hid
In some that longer time are fat’d to last.

And as the spinning of Moon’s sky will bid
High and ebb tide to wash upon the shores,
Thus Florence’s fate in wayward course e’er did;

For which is not to wonder what of lores
Of hightborn Florentines I have to say,
Of whom by Time are hidden fame and mores.
The Ughi I saw, and Catellini, away
To fade, with Greci, Ormanni, each famous name,
Filippi and Alberichi, all gone astray;
And saw exalted ones, and old, who came
To naught: Sannella and Arca's might, and too
Bostichi, Ardinghi and Soldanieri's fame.

Above the gate which now is weight'd by new
Treachery, heavy so that before long
To the state's vessel greatest harm will do,
The Ravignani dwelt, to whom belong
Earl Guy and all the rest who took their name
From renowned Bellincione: scatter'd throng.

Those of the Pressa to rule's knowledge came
Already then, and Galigai would gold
At hilt and pommel for their mansion claim.
Large loomed yet the Vaio's column; bold
With Sacchetti, Fifanti and Giuochi were
Galli and Barucci, as those blushing for old
Bushel's fraud. The Calfuccis' stock yet there
Was thriving; Sizi and Arrigucci had been
Raised to highest seats of public care.
O how I saw those that undone are seen
Thanks to their pride! and were the gilded balls
Sap to make Florence bud as great deeds' queen.

Thus act'd the fathers of those who, when falls
Shorn of bishop your church, will become fat
Sitting as bursars in the council's calls.
That overbearing stock which rages at
People in flight, but as a lamb grows tame
To those who shew'd their purse, or fiercely spat,
Was on the rise, though from a humble name;
So Ubertin Donato was not pleas'd
When by father-in-law's choice he became
Related. Caponsacco his seat had leas'd
At market, from the hill, and Giuda a good
Standing, with Infangato, in the town seiz'd.

What I 'll say now, though true, true hardly would
Seem: of the narrow wall's enclosure's gates
One was nam'd after Della Pera brood.
Each man who bore the fair badge of the inmates
Of the great baron whose good name and prize
Is renew'd for Saint Thomas' feast, relates
To him his knighthood and his honour'd rise;
Though he who now bears it with golden band
Its worth to people's meetings will demise.
Gualterotti in the city had gained stand
With Importuni; and were the Burgh more quiet,
Had not new neighbours gain'd the upper hand.

The house whence all your tears were born, for spite
Justly brought, which has caus'd your ruin, and set
An end to your serene living, was quite

Honour'd, with all who inside its fold were let;
O Buondelmonte, how rashly did thou fall,
Instead of wedding there, into other net!

Many, who now are sad, with gladness all
Would rejoice, had in Ema drowned thee
God's hand, when first to Florence thou paid call.

But it pleased that old cleft stone you see
At the head of your bridge to rend the last
Florence's peace, which its victim thus would be.

With these stocks, and with many more, such past
Repose saw I in Florence, that no cause
Was to be had that any tear be cast:

And its people I saw, ruled by those
Families, just and glorious so, that then
The lily never was revil'd, but rose,

Not yet made red because of fractious men."
Seventeenth Chant

As to Climenes went, to be made sure
About what against him was said, the lad
For whom not each sons' wish fathers endure,
Such was I, and a like semblance I had
For Beatrice and for the saintly light
That had changed of site to make me glad.

For which my lady: “Send outside,” said “quite
Well stamped by the seal of inner thought,
Thy desire's flame; not that thy words thus might
Make our knowledge increase, but 'cause thou ought
To grow accustomed to most clearly say
Thy thirst, so that apt drink to thee be brought.”

“O dearest root of mine, from such high ray
Lit that, as earthly wits see how inside
Triangles two obtuse angles cannot stay,
Thus thou see the impermanent things laid wide
Before they be in the act, gazing the point
To which all times are present side by side:

While with my dearest Virgil was conjoin'd
I on the mount where souls are cleansed, and
While in the dead domain we were appoint'd,
Grievous words of my future life did brand
My mind, although I feel steadfast and strong
Against the Fate's arrows and stings to stand.

For which my wish would be fulfill'd, as long
As I can hear what destiny looms near;
For, if foreseen, slower come darts along.”

Thus did I speak to the selfsame light dear
That earlier spake to me; and as had will'd
Beatrice, so my wish in words made clear.

Nor through riddles, which in fool folks instill'd
Oracles ere the Lord's lamb, who shall take
Away all sins, for our sins was kill'd,
But through manifest words and careful make
Of speech, that soul radiantly enclosed and shown
By the smile of his sheen told for my sake:

“The transient things, that for you can't be thrown
Out of the leaves of the time's book, are seen
All in the eternal wit together blown:
Necessity this fact, though, does not mean
More than constrains a vessel's course the eye
Watching it while downstream its course has been.
From this source, as sweet organ music I
Could receive in my ear, come in my sight
The events thy future time is laying by.

As from Athens Hippolytus took flight
For his evil stepmother’s slander, thou
Of leaving Florence like shalt suffer plight.

This is will’d, and already is sought the how,
And soon it shall turn out to those in care
Where of Christ is made market even now.

The offended part the guilt shall have to bear
In common cry, as it is wont; but true
Justice ’ll be shewn dispensing vengeance fair.

To leave all most beloved things is due
For thee; and this shall be the unkindest sting
By exile’s bow dealt as first dart and new.

Thou shalt learn how is bitterly salt thing
Strangers’ bread, and how hard going can be
Up and down foreign stairs thy steps to bring.

And heaviest burden shall weigh upon thee
From the evil, fool company that will
With thee in such dismal valley have to flee;

Those, whom ungratefulness and madness fill,
Impiously against thee ’ll move; shortly, though,
From their heads, not from thine, red blood shall spill.

Of their nature of beasts their own acts show
Clear proof; thus thou shalt find cause of just pride
In having kept apart from their brawls low.

Thy first dwelling, and shelter where to hide,
Shall be the great Lombard’s mansion most kind
Upon whose stair the holy bird will ride;

Demeanour so benign in him thou ’ll find,
That in asking and doing, of you two,
Shall be first who falls usually behind.

A man thou ’ll see at his court abiding too,
So imprint’d at birth by this strong stalwart star,
That shall be worthy of note all things he ’ll do.

The earthly folks not yet full conscious are
Of his valour for his new age: these skies
Hardly nine years spun around him so far.

But ere the Gascon deals high Henry lies,
Sparks of his virtue shall appear: he ’ll care
Neither for silver nor for labour’s tries.

His bountiful welcome to all who there
Come, will be so widely known, his foes
Even shall have to this witness to bear.
Confide in him and in his favours; woes  
And joy 'll exchange for him poor men and rich,  
Transforming many a time good sort and throes.

And thou shalt take engrav'd in thee things which  
Thou shalt not tell of him”; and here forecast  
Events hard to believe, such was their pitch.

Then added: “Son, of words heard in the past  
This is the meaning, and this is the snare  
Awaiting thee ere few Sun's turns are cast.

I don't wish thee, though, to thy neighbours bear  
Envy: farther thy life, indeed, extends  
Than when for their bad ways they 'll pay good fare.”

After that, the holy soul's silence portends  
The filling of his weft on the rough loom  
On which I 'd drawn the warp; and I, as tends

To ask advice a doubting man in gloom,  
Himself addressing to person who wills  
Rightly, and loves rightly and straightly sees the doom:

“I can well see,” begin “father, the ills  
That the fast coming future brings, with blow  
Stronger the less a man prudence fulfils;

Therefore I 'd better take foresight, so, though  
The dearest place be foreclosed, I should  
Others not lose for what my verse will show.

Down through the world bitterly void of good,  
And through the mountain from whose top so fair  
Thanks to my lady's eyes rise here I could,

And then from light to light through Heaven's air,  
I learned things which if on earth I spell  
Their taste for many shall be sour to bear;

And, should I truth for shyness not too well  
Serve, I 'm afraid I 'll throw my name away  
In times when men 'ancient' this one will tell.”

The light in which had smil'd during our say  
The treasure I found there, became agleam  
At first as golden mirror in Sun's ray;

Then said: “To those whose troubled inwits deem  
Have cause of shame for selves', or others', guilt,  
Ever thy words to have sour sound shall seem:

Nonetheless, any lie removed, spill'd  
Clearly with open words thy vision paint;  
And leave their scabies scrape those thy words grill'd.

For, if man's taste shall at first bite be pain'd  
By thy voice, it will change to vital food  
Once be digest'd concepts by thee ordain'd.
This cry of thine be as strong wind in wood,
Shaking the most the highest tops; and cause
Of praise not little shall be this, and good.

For that thou hast been shewn along all those
Sorrowful pits, and up the mount, and here,
But the souls whom men's fame picked and chose;

Indeed, the minds of those who men's tales hear
Do not pay heed, nor lend credence, to facts
That have unknown or hidden root; nor fear

Men examples of inconspicuous acts."
Eighteenth Chant

That blessed mirror was rejoicing yet
In his thinking alone, while I would weigh
Mine own, that between sour and sweet was set;

And she who was to God leading my way
Said: “Change thy thoughts; consider that I am
Near Whom all wrongs wrought unto thee lift may”.

I turned to the lovely sounds that dam
Every care of mine: of what, in those
Saint eyes, a love then shone, I hardly a dram

Can signify; not that my words I chose
To trust not, but the memory will fail
To bring such back, unless God it disclose.

That much can I retell of this, with pale
Image: gazing at her, my inner state,
Free from all other wish, to her did sail,

As long as the everlasting glee, that straight
Was beaming onto her, from her fair eyes
Reflected, could me too with full joy sate.

The winning shine that in her bright smile flies
Flashed to me: “Turn now and listen, ’cause
Not just within mine eyes Paradise lies”.

As a man’s stare sometimes may well disclose
Earthly affections, when they become so keen,
That all other soul’s motions they foreclose,

Thus in the blazing of the saintly sheen
To which I turned, lively wish to trade
Aught more with me was manifestly seen.

He began: “In this heavenly fifth grade
Of the tree taking life from summit, by
Which leaves ain’t lost, and fruits are ever laid,

Bless’d spirits dwell, who ere to this our sky
Coming, had been endow’d with such world fame
That to sing it a Muse could hardly try.

Therefore look at the cross’ arms: when I name
A spirit, he will act in such a way
That a swift flare in cloud looks quite the same.”

Upon the cross I saw a light to play
As soon as Joshua name was utter’d; nor
Saw the flash later than the word he ’d say.

And then I saw another light spin, for
The name of noble Maccabee was said,
And to such top was lash the glee; two more
Names, Charlemagne and Roland, then were made,
Whose lights I follow’d with an intent eye,
As a man’s gaze follows hawk’s flight in glade.

Then Renouart and William, nam’d, saw I,
And Geoffrey, and Robert Guiscard, upon
That cross to shine; and then there shone close by,

Moving admix’d with the other lights anon,
The soul who ’d talk’d to me, who shew’d his art
Amongst that heaven’s cantors singing on.

As I turn now to my right-hand side’s part
My duty from Beatrice next to take,
Which by words or by nod she could impart,

I see her lights such a bright shine to make,
So joyful, that her semblance leave by far
Her former aspects, e’en the last, in wake:

Whence I perceive that, come to higher star,
My turning path has grown in size, because
Her fair adornments much more wondrous are:

Thus, when for worthy deeds his wits enclose
Greater delight, a man from day to day
Perceives that more and more his virtue rose.

And as in a small space of time find way
From blush to pale a woman’s cheeks, when she
Of former shame the burden divest may,

Such look’d, before mine eyes turned to see,
Beatrice, after the temper’d star’s white hue
That within the sixth sky had lifted me.

I saw that Jovial star’s sparkles to hew
Before mine eyes the signs of human writ,
Flaring with love that to be seen there ’s due.

And as birds’ swarms rising from where they sit
To pasture, cheering seemingly of their food,
In round or diverse figure can be split,

Thus the saint creatures that in those lights stood
Were flying while they sang, and now a D,
Now a I, now a L compose they would.

First to their song they danced; then they ’d be
Form’d into a letter, and some time, in it
Dispos’d, silently stood, from motion free.

O Pegasean Muse, who the human wit
Make glorious and long-lived, so through thee
The towns’ and kingdoms’ earthly rules are lit,

Shine on me with thy light, so that by me
Are told those figures as they were receiv’d:
Thy might in my short writ may all men see!
I say that thirtyfive signs I perceiv'd:
Those vowels and consonants in my mind
I noted as by me they were conceiv'd.

“DILIGITE IUSTITIAM” thus I ‘d find
As first verb and first noun of the saint show;
“QUI IUDICATIS TERRAM” came behind.

Then in the \( M \) of the fifth word their glow
Remain’d fixed, so that, their gold among,
Jove’s candid gleam silvery sparks would blow.

And then saw I more lights come down along
The summit of the \( M \), and there to stay
Singing, methinks, God’s loving in their song.

And as, by striking burning logs, thence may
Erupt numberless sparks, from which are wont
Some fool men to draw omens, upward way

From there thousands of lights then took, in front
Of me, more and less rising, as were sent
By the sun without which resplend they won’t;

And remaining wherever each one went,
An eagle’s head and neck those fires saw I
With distinct flaring there to represent.

He who paints there, no guide has to paint by;
He is the very guide, and after him
Take virtues that shape nests for birds of sky.

The rest of blessed souls, akin to a slim
And lily-looking \( M \) at first, then could
To the new figure with short motion trim.

O sweet star, how thick-spread are there, and good,
The gems that shewed me our justice flows
From the sky where thou, shining jewel, stood!

For which I beg of the mind from which grows
Thy motion and thy virtue, to look down
And see the smoke dimming thy rays whence blows;

And seeing in the temple of the town
By miracles and martyrs raised, sell
And buy, to shake with anger his dread crown.

O host celestial which I saw, thou well
Should pray for those on earth being misled,
Bound by bad shepherds’ ill example’s spell!

The wars of bygone times with swords were led;
But now they ‘re made by taking swiftly away
From right and left the consecrated bread.

And thou, who write only to erase, should pay
Heed to Peter and Paul who, though they died
For the vineyard thou waste, alive still stay.
But thou 'd affirm: “I set my heart with pride
On him who liv'd alone, whom they would haul
To martyrdom for the lewd dance decried,
So I know not the Fisherman, nor Paul”.

45
Nineteenth Chant

In front of me spread out each far-flung wing
The fair image made up in their sweet glee
By the happy souls conjoin’d as single thing;

Every one a ruby seem’d to be,
In which sun’s rays were so burningly incended,
That them refracted to my eyes I ’d see.

And what it behoves me to tell extended,
Never was voic’d, nor was laid out in ink,
Nor man’s imagination to such tended;

For I saw and I heard in the same wink
The eagle’s mouth to speak, and voice out ‘I’
And ‘mine’ as if ‘we’ and ‘our’ ’twas meant to think.

And so began: “Justice and piety ‘s why
I ‘ve been exalted to this glory, such
That no man’s wish greater renown could try;

And on earth I left memory so much
Rever’d, that all those wicked folks commend
It, but with my past history lose touch”.

As but a single heat around would send
Multitudinous embers, thus one sound
From many loves the image would let intend.

For which I then: “O in time without bound
Flowers of joy eternal, who make me
Feel as but one all the scents that redound

From you, sate, speaking, fasting hard to be
Sustain’d, that long held me of hunger prey,
Not finding food for it on earth or sea.

Well know I that, if other kingdoms may
Mirror in Heaven the justice divine,
Yours learns it not through hazy, or dimmer, ray.

You know with what eager intent repine
I for your words; you know which is the doubt
That for long fasting makes me wish to dine.”

As hawk that can at last pull its head out
Of the hood looks around and claps its wings,
Shewing an eager will and boasting stout,

Such saw I make itself that bird, of things
Form’d who all prais’d in choir the divine grace
With songs enjoyed but in those high rings.

“He who bent to the farthest bound of space
The vault of Cosmos, and distinct within
Put things so many, of plain or covert trace,
Could not so far imprint his valour in  
All the universe, that his high word would not  
By infinite excess his own work win.

Clearly this shews he who proud was begot,  
The sum of all creation, who unripe fell  
Having not wait’d for light, marred by blot;

Hence any lesser nature narrow cell  
Is seen to be for that unending good  
But with itself itself measuring well.

Therefore our sight, that needs nothing else could  
Be than some ray of that supernal mind  
From which all things created take their food,

Can’t on its own be of such mighty kind  
As not to see that its beginning lives  
Much beyond all its faculties can find.

Therefore the sight which your own world receives  
Can of his justice plumb the high decrees  
But as the eye inside the sea perceives;

The eye that, though from shore the bottom sees,  
In open sea will lose it; nonetheless,  
It ‘s there, but depth will hide it by degrees.

Light there can never be for you, unless  
From ever unperturb’d serene it rays;  
But flesh’s shadow or venom, or darkness.

Now there lie open wide to thee the ways  
To see the hidden living justice thou  
Made question of on many doubtful days,

Saying: ‘A man is born in India, and now  
Is not there anyone who can discourse  
Of Christ, or read or write; and anyhow

All his wishes and deeds follow good course,  
As far as human reason can discern;  
No sin his words and thoughts, nor life, endorse.

He dies without baptism’s or faith’s concern:  
Where is this justice damning him? And why,  
If without fault he believes not, be stern?’

Now who art thou, who to sit judge do try  
To assess things sited thousand miles away  
With sight so short as to miss things nearby?

For sure he who with me should subtly assay  
Could by right entertain wonder and doubt,  
If the Scripture on you would not cast ray.

O beastly grounds! O minds wholly without  
Subtlety! The first will, that ‘s highest good  
By itself, from itself never stray’d out.
Is right what in agreement with it stood:
No created good things attract it, 'cause
It their existence gives, radiating, food."

As the stork on her nest turns, in the pause
After feeding her sons, and as the fed
Nestling looks up at her in sat'd repose;

Such made itself the bless'd image, and led
Thus was I to raise eyes to it, whose wings,
Impelled by so many wills, fast sped.

It sang gyrating, and "As are hid things
My notes to thee, who intend them not" it said,
"Thus to men's ears the eternal counsel rings".

Those Holy Ghost's bright fires then their time bade
In silence, in the sign that made the empire
Of Rome worthy of world's reverence still laid;

And then again: "To this realm our sire
Admits no one who in Christ did not believe,
Either before or after his death dire

Nail'd to the wood. But see: without reprieve
Many shout out: 'Christ, Christ!' who shall be near
To him much less, than some who Christ perceive

Not; and such Christians damnation must fear
From the Ethiopian, when the two ranks shall part,
One rich forever, one poor with dread and tear.

What shall the Persian tell your kings for start,
When first on the great book written he reads
Openly each offence of their wick'd art?

There will be read, amongst king Albert's deeds,
The mischief, that shall soon make write the quill,
For which Prague's kingdom to its downfall speeds.

There will be read the grief which on Seine will
Induce, by counterfeiting coinage, he
Who shall die hit by boar, for horse's spill.

There will be read the pride that makes fool be,
For power's pride and thirst, English and Scot,
Who to their borders won't suffer decree.

Seen shall be too there the lust and lax rot
Of the Bohemian's and the Spaniard's name,
Who virtue, unknown to them, desired not.

Seen shall be there to Jerusalem's 'Lame'
Mark'd with 'I' his good deeds, whereas the bad
With an 'M' shall be noted, for his shame.

Seen shall be the avarice and faint heart had
By him who has in ward the isle of fire,
Where Anchises divest'd his flesh long clad;
And to denote how petty he is, our sire
Shall write of him with broken letters, by
This saving space, for nothing 's worth to admire.

And shall be apparent to one and all how lie
Debas'd the uncle's deeds, and brother's, who
Two crowns and a good state cuckolded, fie!

And those of Norway and of Portugal too
Will there be known, as will the Balkan king
Who ill the Venice coins aspired to.

O bless'd Hungary, if she rejects the sting
Harming her! bless'd Navarre, provided she
Arms herself with the mountains that her ring!

And each man should believe portent to be
Of this, that the two Cyprus towns complain
And groan for their monarch so beastly, he

Who rightly sides with other beasts insane."
Twentieth Chant

When he who on all the world diffuses light
From our own hemisphere sets down—the day
Coming to an end on all the lands in sight—,
The sky, erstwhile afire but from his ray,
All of a sudden can be seen again
For many lights in which the sun's finds way;

And this image came forward in my brain,
As the beak of the symbol of world's might
And of its leaders would from speech refrain;

For, shining more and more, each sparkling light
Began to sing in melodies that seem
From my memory's hold to take swift flight.

O sweet love that within thy smile's bright beam
Mantle thyself, how ardent was thy look
In those flutes where but holy feelings stream!

After the endearing shining gems, which took
In that sixth heaven place of jewels, set
An end to their angelic peals, a brook

I seem'd to hear, babbling along vale wet
By clear streams coursing down from stone to stone,
Showing the abundant source from where they 're let.

And as the notes which guitar's strings intone
From the neck take their pitch, or in bagpipe
From the hole does the wind borrow its tone,
Thus, as though all delay away to wipe,
Rose through the eagle's neck—as if it were
Hollow—a whisper; and when it was ripe

It became voice, and this took to the air
Through the beak in the shape of words, just such
As my heart had await'd, which I wrote there.

"That part of me that sees, and the sun's touch
Suffers in mortal birds," the eagle spake
"Now it is time thou should look at, with much

Care, for among the fires from which I take
Life, those that shining in my eye are seen
Are highest of the kind that my form make.

He who in the middle gives my iris sheen
Sang of the Holy Ghost, and mov'd the Ark
From place to place to where it since has been:

Now he knows of his song the worthy mark
-As far as from his will it did proceed-
From the rewards that to his actions hark.
Of five circling my brow he who 's the lead,
Nearest the beak, the widow had comforted
Of her son's death, as men are wont to read:

Now he knows what it costs to have not consorted
With Christ, having experienc'd both this sweet
Life and the opposed one, first to him sorted.

And he who along the arc takes the next seat,
On the brow's summit, could his death delay
Imploring in true penance at God's feet:

Now he knows that eternal judgements stay
Not really changed, when the present fate
Is put off to the morrow for worth pray.

He who follows, lawmaking head of state,
To yield to the Church's dean made himself Greek,
With good intention which bad fruits bore late:

Now he knows how the evil come to leak
From his good deed is not taken to account
Against him, though the world's foundations creak.

And he who 's seen the brow's arc to dismount
Was William, wept by that unlucky land
Under Fredrick and Charles tearfully down'd.

Now he knows how the heavens hand in hand
Go with the worthy kings, and in his bright
Sheen still declares his privileged stand.

Who would believe in your world of dim light
That the Trojan Ripheus takes the fifth place
In this circle, among the saints saint light?

Now he knows many things about God's grace
That the world cannot see, although his own
Sight discerns of God's mind but a faint trace."

As a lark ranging wide on air, alone
First sings, and then falls silent in her glee,
Full of the sweetness of her last-sung tone,

Such looked then, after its speech, to me
The image that bears the imprint of Him from whose
Will each thing shall become as it must be.

My doubt, though on my face it were set loose
-For to it but a glass to its hue was I-,
Could not suffer more time, waiting, to lose,

But compell'd me to say: "What 's this now?" by
The force with which it weigh'd on me: then those
Lights blazed with great joy before mine eye,

And with a brighter gaze thereafter chose
To answer the bless'd sign, lest I remain
In wonder from the doubt that in me arose:
“Thou trust my words, as I can see most plain,
But for they come from me, but don't see how
They can be: thus thy thoughts, though trusting, strain.

And thou behavest in the same way, now,
As the man who can name a thing, but can't
Learn its essence; another's help needst thou.

The Heaven's kingdom changes its will's slant
Forc'd by love and live hope, to which God may
Some his divine decrees to overcome grant;

Not as a man keeps other man at bay,
But winning through His will to become won:
Thus, won, with His benignity holds sway.

My brow's first and fifth soul made thee anon
Wonder, because thou see the angels' lair
Adorn'd by them, who unfaithful thou reckon.

Not pagans, as thou deem, but Christians were
Both when leaving their bodies: this believ'd
In Christ to be, that in thorns Christ did bear.

Indeed, one back from Hell, from where repriev'd
None for good will can be, to life again
 Came thanks to a man's live hope, to be reliev'd;

A man's live hope, from which warm prays would gain
The might to make God call him back from Hell,
So that his will could become good from vain.

The glorious soul of whom I want to tell,
Returned to its flesh, where it remain'd
But shortly, in Him confided who could well
Help it; and in its faith such fire attain'd
Of true love that, its flesh once again died,
These delights it was worthy to have gain'd.

The other soul -for grace whose flow is tied
To source so deep, no creature ever could
Its pristine ripples, though by far, have spied-
Set, down on earth, all of its love to good;
For which, from grace to grace, God made its sight
Open to Man's redemption, that still would
Have to come; and in this it trust'd by right,
Nor suffer'd any more to bear the stink
Of false gods, but reproach'd those in that blight

Immers'd. Three women, whom thou saw in link
With the saint cart's right wheel, a thousand years
Ere baptism him to have christen'd thou must think.

How the predestination's root far veers
From all the wits that fail wholly to see
The first cause which our hidden courses steers!
And in your judgements should ye mortals be
Tightly controll'd; for those destin'd to bliss
Are hid to us, God's sight tough enjoy we;

And sweet to us is this our want, for is
Our good made all the keener in this thing,
That what 's God's will, our own 's the same with His.”

Thus the divine image's discourse did bring,
To make clear my short sight, medicine sweet
To me, to cure my doubt's unwelcome sting.

And as good guitarist makes his sound meet
The song of a good singer, whence will gain
More delight each heard melody in its beat,

Thus -I recall-, while the sign spoke, the twain
Blessed lights could be seen in tune to flash
With the words that were said, as wax and wane

In perfect step left with right eyelash.
Twenty-first Chant

Already were my eyes turn'd to the face
Of my lady, and the soul with them, in ban
Putting of any other intent all trace.

She did not smile; but "Should I smile" began
Telling me "thou would share Semeles' fate
When, ignit'd by Jove's sight, to ashes ran;

'Cause my beauty, at each successive gate
Of the everlasting mansion more in sheen
Increasing, as thou saw, with greater height,

Has to be temper'd; otherwise thou 'd been
Overwhelm'd in thy mortal mettle, by
It, as frond which by lightning split is seen.

We rose to reach the seventh splendid sky,
Of which under the Lion's ardent breast
Now down on earth the rays and virtue lie.

To send thy wit behind thy sight now 's best,
Making of them a mirror to the image
That in this shining planet finds its nest."

He who could know to what exalted stage
I 'd fed my soul into her blessed sight
Till her words made my heed turn to other page,

Would understand how much agreeable might
Be to obey my celestial escort there,
One with the other side balancing quite.

Within the crystal-clear spaces that bear,
Girdling the world, the name of the dear king
Who, banning malice, made in past life fair,

As in sun's rays resplendent golden thing
Saw I a stair of steep ascent, so long
To the far end my sight I could not bring.

And, more, on the stair's steps I saw such throng
Of shining lights descending, that I thought
All sky's splendours were flowing there along.

And as, after their own nature, are brought
The crows together, when begins the day,
Milling around, by chill their plumes being caught;

Then some without return will fly away,
Others to where they moved from go back,
And others still, wheeling about, will stay;

Like manner seem'd to me to keep the pack
Of those lights, that together flock'd, as near
A certain step led them at last their track.
And the light that to us went closer, clear
Became so, that I said within my mind:
“Well can I see the love thou shew me here”.

But she from whom I wait the time and kind
To speak and to be silent, to herself keeps;
For which my eager quest I hold behind.

And she, into whose wit my silence seeps
In the intending of him who all perceives,
Told me: “Fulfil hot wish that in thee creeps”.

So I began: “My merit ill conceives
To be worth of thy answer; but for grace
Of her through whom my quest free path receives,

O blessed life absconding thy fair face
Inside thy happy effulgence, let me know
The reason pushing so near me thy pace;

And tell why in this heaven fails to blow
That paradise’s sweet symphony, which sounds
In the other spheres, devout feelings to show”.

“Thy hearing as thy sight has human bounds”
Was the reply; “therefore here is not sung
For, as her smile, our song mortals confounds.

Down the holy stair until this lower rung
I solely descend’d to welcome thee
With my words and these rays to my soul clung;

Nor greater love made my pace faster be:
Indeed, above as much and more love raves,
As by our blazing lights thou can well see.

But the charity high, that make us slaves
Ready to obey the counsel ruling all,
Assigns here roles each of us for him craves.”

“Well see I, sacred light” went forth my call,
“How your love freely given in this court
Within the bounds of divine will does fall;

But to intend this one thing my wit is short,
Why thou alone wert foreordain’d to fill
This task among all souls in your cohort.”

Nor did I come to these last words, until
That light, taking as centre its midpoint,
Revolved unto itself as fast grindmill;

Then the love there inside this answer coin’d:
“Divine sheen, penetrating by the light
Of this in which I dwell, on me ‘s appoint’d:

And its virtues, together with my sight,
Raise me above myself so much, that I
Can see the essence divine that makes it bright.
Hence comes the joy manifested in my
Blazing; for with the clarity of my own
Sight of it, my flame’s brightness will comply.

Even the soul that clearest shines alone,
Though, or the seraph in God’s gaze most deep,
Answer to this thy question could give none;

For in such unattain’d abyss and steep
Of God’s writ what thou ask forever ’s hid,
Into no creature’s wit ‘s allow’d to seep.

And make from this foolish presumption rid
The mortal world, when thou come back, so it
Dare not for such high aim attempt to bid.

While here shines, on the earth is cloud’d the wit;
Therefore consider whether is down there
Possible what to raised souls ‘s unfit.”

So much abat’d his words my former care,
I dropp’d my quest, and asked him instead,
Humbly, who in his mortal life he were.

“Between the twain Italian shores a head
Of rocky mountain rises, from thy lands
Not far, higher than clouds which thunders shed,
And makes a hump nam’d Catria, whereto stands
Aught lower a monastery, for sole
God’s cult built there by the devout men’s hands.”

Thus a third time he assum’d my mentor’s role;
And then added these words: “There I became
In the service of God so firm, it stole
Away from me thoughts other than his name,
So that but with the olives’ juice for food
I bore with ease the heats and colds that came.

Was wont to reap that cloister many good
Souls’ harvest to these skies; and now is lean,
As in short time be common knowledge should.

Peter Damiano was I there, and dean;
And at Our Lady’s house on Adrian shore
With Peter Sinner’s name of late I ’ve been.

Of mortal life I had but little store,
When I was call’d and drawn to the red hat
Which is dragg’d from good name to bad, and more.

Cefas and the Holy Ghost’s vessel had sat
In any humblest hostel, and barefoot
And lean wander’d about. Now all that
Is gone: our shepherds won’t proceed on foot,
But demand to be propp’d on left and right
-Such is their weight-, with sumptuous train and boot.
Their rich mantles their palfreys hide from sight,
So that one skin cover two beasts: o high
Patience, who bear such an accursed blight!

At this loud voice many sparkles saw I
Descend from step to step, spinning, and grow
With ev'ry turn more beauty adorned by.

They all gather'd and stood around our low
Place, and the tranquil sky they rent asunder
With a cry so high-pitched, as to blow

My sense away; so much won me that thunder.
Twenty-second Chant

By wonder hit, toward my guide I turned
As does a child, always resorting to
Her by whom his least needs are never spurned;

And she, as caring as a mother who
Runs in support of pale, short-winded son
With words that most his mood can soothe and woo,

Told me: “Dost thou not know be treading on
Heavenly bounds, which all is saint inside,
And all intention by good zeal is won?

How thou would have been changed deep and wide
By their song and my laugh, now thou can see,
Since their cry gave thy wit such troubled ride;

In which, had thou intended what can be
Its prayer, thou would know the vengeance due
To come ere the last day has dawn’d for thee.

This kingdom’s sword does not cut with undue
Haste, nor too late, save in the thought of man
Whose wait of dread or of desire takes hue.

But turn at last to the other souls: thou can
See most illustrious spirits shining here,
If as I say those ranks and files thou scan.”

As she liked, my eyes around I steer,
To see small spheres uncounted, whose rays shine
Upon each other with enhanced cheer.

I stood as a shy man, repressing mine
Desire’s sting, not affording to give vent
To it, in fear to pursue noxious line;

And the brightest and biggest pearl then went
From where it stood nearer to me, to make
Content my wish with its benign intent.

Then inside it I heard: “Should thy wit take
Cognisance of our charity, whose fire
Shines forth, thou would for sure thy thought unbreak.

But so that thou should not for such desire
Delay the lofty aim, I ’ll now reply
To doubts that, unexpressed, thy mind tire.

The mountain on whose side is seen to lie
Cassino, was inhabit’d on its top
By folks deceiv’d, bound in wrongful tie;

And I was who, therein, firstly would stop
To bring the name of Him by whom was brought
On earth the truth granting us glorious crop;
And such God’s grace there shone on me, I bought
Back, from the allure for impious rites they felt,
The towns around, and them drove to true thought.

These other fires were all saint men who dwelt
In contemplation, warmed by that light
From which bless’d blossoms and good fruits have well’d.

Here ‘s Macarius, here Romualdus bright,
Here are my friars who within my wall
Firmed their feet and with stout hearts held tight.”

To which said I: “The benign look in all
Of your blazes I can detect, as well
As the affection with which thou heed my call,

So bolster’d up my confidence, as swell
Under Sun’s rays the flowers, when they grow
To reach the full extent their natures tell.

For which I beseech thee, father, to show
-If to be granted such high grace I dare-
Thy semblance sheer, divested from thy glow.”

And he: “Brother, this high wish -to see bare
My essence- shall be fill’d in the last sky,
Where fulfilment all else with mine will share.

There all wishes, perfected, at rest lie
In ripe wholeness, as only there each part
Stays where its place forever was cast by,

Because all, unlocated, take no start
Around some pole; and our stairs till there
Rise, for which far so from thy sight depart.

Up to that sphere saw those stairs ride the air
Jacob patriarch, when they by him were seen
Laden, for angels’ throngs they seem’d to bear.

But now, to ascend these stairs, no one is keen
To raise foot from the earth, for which remains
My rule as paper that unlearnt has been.

The walls that girded abbeys’ fair domains
Have become dismal dens, and the friars’ hem
Is as bags’ which bad flour with blemish stains.

But foul usury ‘s not taken by them
With as much God’s displeasure, as the fruit
That from the foolish hearts of monks will stem:

For all that is within Church’s ward must suit
The needs of folks who ask help in God’s name;
Not those of monks’ dear ones, or worse recruit.

The mortals’ flesh is so prone to false aim,
That down there good beginnings do not last
From an oak’s birth till its first acorns came.
Peter without silver or gold was cast
To preach, and Francis humbly in his lair,
And I with prayers and with tiresome fast.

And should thou look where each began, and where
Afterward each arrived at, thou 'll see
The white to brown trespass despite all care.

However, greater wonder was the sea
To be parted, and Jordan run upstream,
Than this evil be heal'd, should God decree.”

Thus he spake, and went back to his peers’ team,
And all that throng collect’d itself and, tight
As a whirlwind, to swirl far up did seem.

My sweet lady’s sole nod pushed me right
After them up the stair, so soon my weak
Nature against her virtue lost the fight;

Nor down here, where by nature’s means we seek
To ascend, ever was seen so fleet a run
That as quick as my wing could reach the peak.

Would, reader mine, that I can see but one
Time more the devout triumph for which my
Sins I repent and often my breast stun,

As it ‘s true that thou couldn't pull out thy
Finger from burning fire faster than were
Seen by me the Twins' stars, and there was I.

O glorious sign, light of good omen, where
Great virtues are inlaid, from which I own
To derive of my wit all that is fair,

With thee did rise and set the star that ‘s known
To father ev'ry mortal being, when felt
I first the Tuscan air on me be blown;

And then, when the high grace to me was dealt
To enter the high wheel spinning thee round,
Within thy place for God's decree I dwelt.

Devoutly now my wits address thy bound
Sighing, to gain such virtue as to relate
The strenuous step leading to higher ground.

“Thou art so near to last salvation's state”
Began Beatrice “that thy sight should be
Made unclouded and keen for such saint bait;

Therefore, ere thou ‘rt immers'd in it, do see,
Looking down, what extent of world I made
Thee put under thy feet, sky, earth and sea;

So that thy heart, by happiness inlaid
Far as it can, may meet the exulting throng
Which comes through this concave ethereal glade.”
With my sight I went back and down, along
All seven spheres, and smil'd at the small size
Of the vile globe to which we men belong;
And that counsel I hold to be most wise
Which belittles our den; and those who elsewhere
Put their thought, really live in upright guise.

I saw then Leto's daughter shining fair
Without the stains that gave me ground to think
That substance thin and thick inside could bear;
Thy son's look, lofty Hyperion, without blink
I beheld here, and how it around
And near with Venus Mercury keeps link.

Then I was shewn, holding the middle ground
Between son Mars and father Saturn, mild
Jove, and the way in tortuous paths they wound.
And all seven of them, as past they fi'l'd,
Were shewn in their great size and awesome speed,
And in great spans their houses stride, and wild.
The lands that lead us to such savage greed,
While I am turning with the eternal Twins,
From high grounds to the shores their looks now feed
To me; then the fair gaze mine own eyes wins.
As bird, hidden inside beloved fronds,
Rests amid his sweet brood, passing the night
That to us living souls all things absconds,

But, to discern again the endearing sight
And to find food to feed his nestlings -toil
Which makes it gladly endure many a long flight-

Forerunning time on outer branch will coil,
Where with burning affection waits the light,
Staring intent for dawn to pierce the soil;

Thus was standing my lady, erect in sight
And intent, turned to that part of sky
Where less hastens sun's cart, and shines more bright:

So that, in seeing her suspended by
Desire, I made myself as man who pines
For missing thing, in hope content to lie.

But little time had I waited, when signs
Began I to perceive that more and more
Clear were becoming all the heaven's lines.

And said Beatrice: “Here comes the blessed core
Of the throngs of Christ's triumph; see, at last
Here 's the fruit these revolving heavens bore!”

Her face with burning semblance was o'er-cast,
And her eyes were so full of joy, my rhyme
Can't attempt to paint them, thus is surpass'd.

As during the serene full-moon's night time
Amongst the eternal nymphs Diana smiles,
In all coves beautifying the heaven's clime,

Above me saw I strewn on endless miles
Lights by the thousands: and a sun incended
All, as our own incends stars' ranks and files;

And through the dazzling light that thence descended
Seep'd the bright substance into my sight so clear
That such could not by me ever be attended.

O Beatrice sweetest guide and dear!
She said: “What overwhelms thee is the high
Virtue that no defence shall ever fear.

Here 's the wisdom and might that between sky
And earth open'd the road, of which mankind
For so long time in wanting had to lie.”

As lightning will out of the clouds unwind,
For being dilat'd so that it 's not contain'd,
And shoot down, in contrast to its own kind,
Thus my own wit, greater extent attain'd
From those foods, outside itself was cast,
Nor what it did was by the mind retain'd.

“Open thy eyes and gaze on me at last:
Thou saw things that made thee able and ready
To bear my smile better than in time past.”

I was as man who, though come round already
From vision he forgot, in vain will strive
To bring it back to mind distinct and steady

When I heard this her offer, which did drive
Me to such gratitude, that nothing will
Memory's book of its record deprive.

Should now sound loud those tongues, whose words did fill
Polymnia and sisters all for lyric art
With the sweet milks that from their bosom spill,

To help me in my toil, a thousandth part
Of truth could not be attain'd, singing the smile
Which with bright rays made the saint semblance dart;

And thus, the Paradise to paint, simile
Can't be found, and the sacred poem 's fit
To skip, as pilgrim skirts impervious mile.

But he who thinks of the overwhelming writ
And of the mortal shoulder which the load
Bears, would for sure not blame, for trembling, it:

For not for puny vessel is the broad
Sea my rash prow is cleaving, nor can be
For helmsman who but lenient courses rode.

“Why does my face with loving feelings thee
So enthral, that thou don't turn to the lawn fair
Which under the Christ’s rays flower I see?

Here 's the rose into which took carnal lair
The divine word; here too those lilies dwell
Whose perfume of right paths made men aware.”

Thus Beatrice; and I, who all ready and well
Disposed was to her advice, again
Turn'd my weak sight to new hard battle's spell.

As at some time my eyes, in shade outlain,
Had seen a glade of flowers being lit
By ray of sun piercing a sky of rain;

Thus saw I there many sparks' throngs to sit
Made shining from above by burning rays,
But no sheen's source, screen'd as I was from it.

O benign virtue that imprint thy ways
On them, thou rose high up, to lend more ease
To my eyes, which could not bear thy forays.
The name of the fair flower I never cease
From invoking, made me keener to stare
Intently afore, that greater flame to seize.

And as both eyes had paint'd how was the fair
Star and how bright, which, as on earth did win
All else, so the other sheens was winning there,

Through the ether a spark came down there in,
Form'd as a garland and as circle round,
Which, girdling her, round her began to spin.

All melodies that down on earth can sound
And more attract the soul with sweet accent,
Are thunders from rent cloud, apt to confound

The ear, compar'd to the fair lyre's concert
From which was crown'd the beautiful sapphire
That to the sky its azure light had lent.

“I am the angels' love, dancing in gyre
Around the haughty glee coming from lair
Which was host to the object of our desire;

And gyrating I 'll follow thee to where,
Lady, thou go after thy son, that sky
Supernal making holier for being there.”

These words the spinning notes were sealed by,
And all the other lights made then resound
The heaven's sides, Mary's name calling high.

The royal mantle of all spinning round
Spheres, which more yearns and more 's enliven'd in
God's spirit and God's laws, its inner bound

Had so far sited above us, to win
The distance which could carry there my sight,
For where I was I fail'd to see within:

Therefore my eyes were not of enough might
To follow the crown'd flame, who thenceforth rose
After her seed toward such supreme light.

And as small child who stretches his arms close
To the mother, after he suckl'd, for
The soul that outward shews love's fire, so those

Whitenesses stretched up with their flames, nor
Could I mistake this manifest sign they
All to Mary a high affection bore.

Then they remained there across my way,
Singing “Regina coeli” in tone so sweet,
Thereof the pleasure ne'er forget I may.

O how great is the wealth the soul can meet
In those majestic arks that on earth were
Sowers of many a righteous word and feat!
The treasure gain'd in Babylon with care
And tears, when in exile the gold was lost,
Is source of joy and life for all aeons there.

There with the Old and New Testament's host,
Triumphant in his victory under high
Offspring of God and Mary, his utmost
Lov'd pupil, holding keys to glorious sky.
Twenty-fourth Chant

"O ye all who are elect'd to the great meal
Of the Lamb blest, by whom your throng is fed
So, it will never cease yearning to feel,

As this man to somehow foretaste is led
The crumbs that from your table fall, before
He 's cut off from life's time at his death bed,

Take heed of his immense affection, more
Aught giving him, ye who forever drink
From the source of the wine he 's thirsting for."

In those glad souls Beatrice's words would sink;
And each then spun as sphere turning on pole,
Fiercely flaming round, as comets blink.

Such as each wheel in a clock's works has role
Of diverse spin, so the first looks near still
And the last flies as if wind's speed it stole,

Thus each ring, with diverse rhythm dancing, will
Denote its varying bliss' degree, which I
Could then judge by how fast revolv'd its mill.

From the ring I thus deemed richer, my
Eyes then saw come away a fire so glad,
That none it left behind with sheen so high;

And when three turns around Beatrice it had
Complet'd, a song intoned so divine,
That now it can't from my own thoughts be read.

Therefore, my pen having set down, no line
Draw I, because our brush -still less our speech-
Is too rough, and such hues cannot define.

"O holy sister, whose warm love could reach
Me with thy devout prays, thou made me split
From my fair ring, so hotly thou beseech."

Thus from the blessed fire, as soon as it
Had stopped, my fair lady addressing, ran
Out breath of words, as can recall my wit.

And she: "O eternal light of the great man
To whom our blessed Lord entrust'd the key
He brought on earth of this glad, wondrous span,

Test this man wide and deep, whatever be
Thy whim, so that his faith -for which thou went
Upon the waves- with keen review thou see.

Whether he rightly loves and hopes, and bent
Rightly is his creed, from thee 's not hid, because
All things, paint'd in God's mind, to thine are sent;
But since this realm acquir'd as subjects those
Who had the truthful faith, to speak of it
It behoves him, its glory to disclose."

As the bachelor will forearm his wit
In silence, till the master makes his quest,
To argue, for to judge to him 's not fit,

Thus I marshall'd my proofs as I could best,
While she spake, to be ready to reply
To such a master, and my faith to attest.

"Speak up, good Christian: what is faith now try
To tell." At which toward the sheen that blew
Such words, my lower'd eyes then raised I;

And look'd at Beatrice, who at once drew
Me with a nod to pour out, from inside
Me, the stream of all that on faith I knew.

"The Grace allowing me to open wide
My heart" began I then "to such high dean,
May make my thoughts on apt expressions ride."

I went on: "As with truthful writ has been
Said, father, by thy brother dear, who set
With thee Rome on the good track, this I glean:

Faith is substance of things men hope to get
And inference of those hidden to Man;
And in this, so deem I, its nature 's met".

I heard then: "Rightly felt, as long as can
Thou intend why of substance faith has name
As well as root's from which deductions ran".

And I hence: "The deep things that up here came
To bestow upon me their semblance, stay
So hidden down to us men's eyes and aim,

That their essence lies but in faith, by way
Of which men but on it high hopes can found;
And so take name of substance their faith may.

And from this faith it behoves to redound
Deductions, 'cause we lack any other sight;
For which 'inference' name for faith is sound."

Then heard I: "If with judgement as much right
Were intended all knowledge down held dear,
No sophist's wit could win, however bright".

These words out breath'd the loving ardent sphere;
Then added: "Well indeed, so far, I test
The mettle and the weight thy coin shews here:

But hast thou in thy purse such coin, I quest?"
And I: "Ay, I have it, all round and bright,
So that all doubt about its worth 's at rest".
After this, word came out of the deep light
Shining therein: "This precious gem, upon
Which all virtue must stand, within thy sight

How came?" And I: "Large rain, diffused on
Old and new parchments by the Holy Ghost,
Is the concluding argument that won

Finally me, so endowed with the most
Subtle appeal, any other proof one could
Call up, all weight in front of it had lost".

I heard then ask'd: "Old and new writ, that stood
As forceful proof winning thee over, why
Deemst thou be word from God, and hence all good?"

And I: "The proofs by which convinc'd am I
Are the deeds that thence came, whose mettle yet
On her anvil could never Nature ply".

I was answer'd: "What truthful sources let
Thee think those deeds were real? It is the same
Agency that needs proof which those proofs set."

"If toward Christian faith the people came"
Without" said I "miracles, is this deed
Miracle such, none else deserves this name;

For thou took to the fray poor, without feed
In order that the plant of good -once vines
And now all thorns- from thee could take its seed."

As I ended my say, that court of shines
Made resound through the spheres a "Be God prais'd"
In the tune that is sung amongst their lines.

And the baron who 'd drawn me along, and rais'd
Me from branch to high branch, so that we were
Already near the topmost leaves, undaz'd

Took up again: "God's Grace such love did bear
To thy mind, that thy mouth open'd to speak
Till now, as it behov'd, true words and fair,

And so I sanction what from thee did leak:
But what 's thy creed is now fit to wring out,
And whence it enter'd thy belief I seek".

"My holy father, soul who beyond doubt
See what thou had believed in, what made
Thee to the tomb win feet more young and stout,"

Began I then "thou wish by me be said
The mould of my prompt faith, and furthermore
Whence it proceeds thou want out to be laid.

To this I answer: I one God adore,
Sole and eternal, moving all the sky
-Not moved- which desire and love push fore.
And of this faith I see no proofs to lie
In physics or in metaphysics; nay,
The truth gives it to me rained down by

This place, through Moses, prophets and the say
Of psalms, as through the Gospels and through all
Ye, who wrote since God’s fire shew’d sainthood’s way.

Into three eternal persons my creeds fall,
And those I trust so to be one and three,
It ‘s fit with ‘are’ and ‘is’ at once them call.

This deep divine condition, I for thee
Now touch upon, Gospels’ doctrine has blown
In many ways forever within me.

This the beginning, this the ember grown
Later to swell, becoming lively flame,
As star that in the sky sparkles alone.”

As the master hears speech devoid of blame
From his servant, and hence hugs him, in glee
For what he said, as to an end words came,

Thus, blessing me in song, thrice circl’d me,
As soon as I was silent, the saint light
At whose order I ‘d spoken: so much he

Had liked what I said, and judg’d it right!
Twenty-fifth Chant

Should it ever befall the holy verse
To which lent hand heavens and earth -a toil
That for years made me lean- to bend the averse

Cruelty which keeps me barr’d from the soil
Of the fair fold where I was lamb in sleep,
Enemy of wolves giving it dire turmoil;

With a different voice, an older sheep
Of white fleece, I ’ll go back poet, above
My baptism font crowned with laurel deep;

For here the faith I enter’d, through which love
Of God acknowledges human souls, and then
For her my head’s Peter’s three turns behove.

After that, a light came into our ken
Out of the sphere whence had depart’d the prime
Of vicars left by Christ on earth to men;

And full of joy my lady said: “Sublime
Sight! That ’s the noble soul who ’s honour’d by
Men visiting Galicia since long time”.

As, when a dove stays still and comes nearby
Her mate, one to the other cooing shew,
And turning round, their affection, thus I

Saw the two glorious princes render new
Welcome to each other, praising the high food
That up there to the blessed souls is due.

But when the greetings were perfect’d, each would
In front of me stay firm and speechless, bright
So, that such fire hardly sustain I could.

And smiling Beatrice said then: “Light
Most exalted, by whom the plenty of high
God’s mansion was so often told in write,

Make hope’s name resound loudly in this sky:
Thou know, who many a time hast told the tale,
How Christ had with the three more loving tie”.

“Raise thy head and of our sight avail
Thee assuredly; what comes here from below
Its virtue ripens to our rays, though frail.”

This solace did the second fire bestow
On me; so I rais’d my eyes to those tall mounts
That first with heavy weight had kept them low.

“Since by his grace our emperor accounts
Fit for thee to confront, ere death, his knights
In his most secret hall, and see the founts
Of all truth in his court of these bright lights;
So that thou strengthen hope, which so endears,
In thyself and in others, now by rights

Tell us what is this hope, and how it steers
Thy mind, and whence its flowers to thee came."
This adds the light that there second appears.

And the pious lady who guided the lame
Feathers of my poor wings to such high flight
Thus then foreran the answer in my name:

“The Church militant has no son who might
Show more hope, as is written in the sun
Radiating on our whole cohort: for sight

Of Jerusalem’s granted to this one,
Coming from Egypt, ere his soldier’s term
On earth out of the allotted time has run.

The two points more, asked to learn how firm
Is his liking of hope, not because will
Thou hast to know, I leave to him to affirm

With his words, for they ‘ll be not hard to fill
Nor shall they be a cause of pride: reply
He ‘ll give, may God his help in him instil.”

As a pupil seconds his teacher, by
Promptly and willingly expounding what he learnt,
So that his valour can be assessed, I

Said: “Hope of the future glory to be earn’d
Is assur’d expectation, which is wrought
By divine grace and by deserts not spurn’d.

To me from many stars this light was brought;
But in my heart it first instilled the king
Who the leader supreme in his song sought.

‘Those who have learnt thy name’ his verses sing
‘Should hope in thee; and who shall know it not,
Of those whose faith, as mine, is stalwart thing?

Thou inspir’d me still further, when I got
Thy epistle; and I ‘m so full with it,
Your rain I rain again on each dry plot.”

While I was speaking, the live fire was lit
From within by a flickering deep spark
As when by sudden flash a cloud is split.

Then he breathed: “My love blazing up stark
Still now for this high virtue, by which I
Was follow’d till I reach’d victory’s mark,

Demands that I rebreath to thee, who by
Her art pleased; and I ’ll be pleased to hear
In thee what expectations from her lie”.

And I: “From new and old scriptures appear
What 's the target, and such is shewn to me,
Of the souls that to himself does God endear.

Isaiah tells that each of them shall be
Clad in their land of double stole; and their
Land is this blessed life I can now see.

And thy brother much clearer shewed, where
He speaks of the white stoles, what is this true
Promise; all this his revelations bear.”

And when these words were spent, at first a new
Choir above us sang “In thee hope they may”;
To which renew'd round-dancing all those threw.

Then amongst them appear'd so bright a ray;
That, had the Cancer a like shining light,
Its month would be but a perpetual day.

And as, rising, the dances enter might
A happy virgin, to honour the bride,
Not with the faulty intent to appear more bright,

Thus saw I that enliven'd sheen to ride
Toward the two who, as behov'd the blaze
Of their love, there in round danc'd side by side.

He join'd the singing and the dancing rays;
And my lady kept fix'd in them her eye,
As behoves silent bride's motionless ways.

“This is the one whose fate had been to lie
On our pelican's breast; from the cross he
Was call'd to office above others high.”

Thus my lady; nor for these words did she
Remove her sight's attention from them more
Than averted from them earlier could be.

As the man who stares up, setting great store
In watching sun's eclipse, and loses sight
In effort to look steadily at its core,

Thus became I looking at this last light,
While I heard: “Why art dazzl'd thou, to see
Thing that here has not place, nor ever might?

Down into earth my body 's bound to be,
With all the others, until of our saint crowd
The appointed number shall have reached we.

With the two stoles in the bless'd cloister proud
Are but two lights who ascended; and the throng
Of ye mortals of this thou shalt warn loud.”

To this voice ceased the sweet mixed song
Of the threefold concent, and ceas'd as well
The blazing ring from dancing round along,
As when, to avoid a tiresome toil, or spell
Of peril, rowing oars that erstwhile were
Immers'd, for whistle’s blow stopped and fell.

Alas, how great was my worrisome care,
When I turned to see Beatrice, and could
Not see her, though I knew that she was there

Near me, and we both were in the reign of good!
Twenty-sixth Chant

While suspended I lay for my lost sight,
Came from the dazzling flame that made me blind
A voice I listen’d to keenly in my plight,
Saying: “Until thy sense again thou find,
After it was in my splendour consumed,
To make for it it’s fit to exert thy mind.

Begin, thus; and tell me the aim assumed
By thy soul, and be assur’d that thou ’ll again
See, for thy stunned sight shall be resumed;

Because the woman leading thee to gain
These divine regions, holds within her gaze
The might with which Anania lift’d such pain.”

Said I: “Sooner or later she can raise,
As she likes, blindness’ curtain from my eyes
That to her fire, from which I burn, were ways.

The good in which this court’s happiness lies
Is Alpha and O of all the books to me
Read by Love, whether it whispers or cries”.

That same voice that had caus’d my wit to be
Comforted from the sudden dazzle’s fright,
Spurr’d me further to reason, ’cause said he:

“For sure through finer sieve should thou by right
Make thy thought strain: it behoves thee to say
Who point’d thy bow toward such lofty sight”.

And I: “Philosophy shew’d me the way,
And for the authority that hence descends
It’s fit such love’s imprint in me should stay;

‘Cause the good, which as good we intend, incends
Love for it, all the fiercer, as it more
Of goodness in its essence comprehends.

Therefore toward the source which’s sending fore
Such perfection, that any good outside
It, but a pale image of it can store,

It behoves that man’s mind rather should ride
Than elsewhere, as long as it can see
The truth on which his syllogisms abide.

To my wit makes apparent such truth he
Who shows how in God’s love firstly must fall
The eternal substances; this shows to me

The voice of truthful Author, by His call
To Moses, when He says, of His own deeds:
‘Of everlasting good I ‘ll shew thee all.’
From thine own words my wit the same truth reads
In the beginning of thy warning cry
That us above all else mystery feeds.”

“That of thy loves seeks God which ranks most high,
Fed by the unfailing holy writ’s content
And human intellect’s reasons led by;”

Was heard “but furthermore tell if thou ‘rt bent
Toward Him by some other pull; declare
By what sharp teeth of this thine love thou ‘rt rent.”

The holy intentions of Christ’s eagle were
Not hidden from my wit; of where he intended
My assertions to lead I was aware.

Thus I began again: “All bites that tended
To turn my heart to God, in truth I felt,
And all of those my charity extended;

For the world’s nature, that which I was dealt,
The death suffer’d by Him to make me live,
The hope in which with all who ‘ve faith I dwelt,

With the abovemention’d living knowledge, give
My sail wind to come out from the dead sea
Of crooked love, the straight landfall to achieve.

All creatures as abundant fronds I see
In the everlasting peasant’s field to throng,
I love for what of good in them can be.”

As I ceased to speak, the sweetest song
Sounded through all the sky, in which heard I
“Saint, saint, saint!” say Beatrice, and all along.

And, as a piercing light dispels all high
Sleep, for the seeing virtue heeds the sheen
Which from lid to inner lid to seep will try,

And the rous’d man cringes from what is seen,
So unfamiliar ‘s the sudden sight perceiv’d
Until the woken wit has sif’t it clean;

Thus my eyes from all speck were then reliev’d
By Beatrice with her gaze, whose shine
From countless miles away could be receiv’d;

So that better than e’er was henceforth mine
Eyesight; and I was drawn, amaz’d, to quest
Of a fourth light I saw standing in line
With us. At which my lady: “Brightly dress’d
In those rays, loves his Maker the first man
Whose making the first Might ever address’d.”

As a tree’s branch will bend its topmost span
At the rushing of wind, and then again
Will rise, for its own strength redress it can,
Thus made my gesture, while she spake, the strain
Of wonder, and then made me bold anew
Wish to speak, whose fire I could not contain.

And I began: “O fruit that could eschew
Alone both birth and growth, father of old
Of daughters made in-laws when thy sons drew

Them spouses! With all reverence I hold
Beseech I thee to speak: my wish thou see,
Though I don't tell, the sooner to be told.”

As happens that a cover'd pup can be
Showing, despite the cover, its affection
By wriggling under it, such look'd to me

The light cladding the first soul, for the inflection
Of flickering, which shew'd clearly the glee
It felt giving my wish prompt satisfaction.

Then the light breathed out: “Though not to me
Made manifest, better than any thing
Thou most assured hold, thy wish I see:

Because its full image to me does cling,
Reflected by the truthful mirror none
Can equal, where all things faithfully ring:

Thou wish to learn how long allow'd to own
Was I by God the exalted garden, where
Of this long stair thou stepp'd on the first stone;

And how much I enjoyed its sweet air,
And the true cause of God's lofty disdain,
And what idiom I used, and made, there.

Well, son: not the fruit's eating was the main
Cause of the long exile I suffer'd; nay,
I sinn'd 'cause God-imposed bounds I 'd strain.

Where thy lady call'd Virgil from, I lay
In want of this high council of the blest
Forty-three hundred two years to the day;

And saw the sun come back to each sign's rest,
Along its way, for nine hundred and three
Times, while on earth I liv'd at God's behest.

The tongue I spake no longer us'd would be
Ere Nimrod's folks to the rash work put hand
With intent whose outcome no one could see;

‘Cause no custom within reason's command,
Under the fickle wind of mankind's whim,
And stars' influence, long can ever stand.

It 's Nature's way that Man should speak; but him
Then Nature lets to choose his own speech's way
According to what seems have fairer trim.
Ere I descended where in anguish stay
The souls of Limbo, on earth of ‘T’ had name
The highest good from whom derives my ray;

And to be called ‘EL’ henceforth came,
As it was fit, for as a leaf from tree
Falls, and another sprouts, man’s lore ’s the same.

Upon the mount that more rises from sea
Dwelt I, first in pure life and then unclean,
From the first hour to that ordain’d to be

After one fourth of day its end has seen.”
Twenty-seventh Chant

“To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,” began
All Paradise to sing “glory!” so sweet,
I felt inebriated as drunk man.

I felt as if all the universe would meet
This with a smile; thus my elation came
To me through sight’s and hearing’s sublime treat.

O joy! O happiness without a name!
O wholesome life of love and peace! O wealth
In lack of all desire secure and tame!

In front of me the lights providing stealth
To the four souls were still alight, and that
Which had come first, began with brighter health
To shine; and such became, to be look’d at,
As Jupiter would look if, birds being made
It and Mars, each the other’s plumes should get.

The providence, by which up there are laid
Alternations and roles, in each sky’s part
To the choir of the blessed silence bade,

And I heard: “If to change my hue I start,
Don’t wonder; ‘cause, while I am speaking, all
These thou shalt see to follow the same art.

He who usurps down on earth the place of call,
My place, my place, my place, where want is felt
Of God’s Son’s presence, my tomb has let fall
To the level of sewer; blood there well’d
And stink: for which rejoices in Hell’s pit
The evil spirit that here up once dwelt.”

I saw then all the sky to become lit
Of that colour in which at dusk and dawn
Cloud is painted by sun out-facing it.

And as an honest woman can be drawn,
Though of herself assur’d, to become shy,
For hearing other’s fault ill ease will spawn,

Thus Beatrice chang’d her semblance; I
Believe a like eclipse may have been seen,
At the supreme might’s passion, in the sky.

Then the words of the soul hid in the sheen
Went on with voice so chang’d from previous tone,
That more transform’d his semblance had not been:

“The bride of Christ was given flesh and bone,
By the blood of myself, Linus and Clete,
Not so that were accrued gold to her throne;
But, to acquire this happy life and neat,  
Sixtus, Pius, Callistus, Urban shed  
Their blood after large grief they had to meet.

It was not our intention that be led  
A part of Christians to the right hand side  
Of our successors, part to the left spread,

Nor that the keys entrust’d to me should ride  
As emblem on the banners put in field  
‘Gainst the baptis’d to wage wild war and wide;

Nor that with papal symbol should be seal’d  
Benefits sold for gold, woven of lies,  
For which my sheen with crimson sparkles reel’d.

Greedy wolves clad as shepherds from these skies  
Can be seen prowling all the pastures down:  
Why God’s defence its help to men denies?

From Gascony and Caorsa to my town  
Come to drink of our blood: from good beginning,  
To what vile end’s ill fate went thy renown!

But the high providence with Scipio winning  
For Rome the rule of the whole world soon will,  
As I perceive, help you dispel the sinning.

And thou, son, who to low terrestrial sill  
Shalt for thy mortal weight return, don’t fail  
To openly divulge what I thee instil."

As falls in frozen flakes the snow or hail  
Downward in earthly air, when has the Sun  
Entered Capricorn, with winter’s gale,

Thus saw I there up through the ether run  
Triumphant vapours that with us had dwelt,  
And all the sky with this white updraft spun.

My eyes follow’d their semblance, but they ‘d melt  
To such distance, my sight’s power was strain’d  
Beyond its limit, and its aim dispell’d.

For which my lady, seeing me not constrain’d  
To stare up any longer, told me: “Draw  
Thy sight down, to assess the view attain’d”.  

From the time that first down the earth I saw  
I perceiv’d to have been mov’d through all the stretch  
Cover’d from halfway to end by clime least raw;

So that hither I saw where as a wretch  
Ulysses sailed out, and thither where  
Europa made herself sweet load to fetch.

And more I could have gaz’d of this land fair  
To the east; but the sun under my feet  
Forward had gone more than a sign from there.
My enamoured mind, in which has seat
Ever the longing for my lady, burn’d
All the more with her sight my eyes to treat:

And if by art or nature were ever turn’d
Foods for the sight through which the mind to snare,
In images or in human flesh, all spurn’d

Singly or together could have been, such rare
Divine delight engulfed me in its light,
When to her smiling gaze I gave my care.

And the virtue her stare lent me, the bright
Nest of Leda made me desert, and sent
Me to the fastest sky with sudden might.

The parts thereof near sited or far bent
Are so uniform, I could never say
To which, by Beatrice’s will, I went.

But she, who had well seen my silent pray,
Began, laughing the while with mirth so bright
That of God’s very joy her face shew’d ray:

“The world’s nature, that makes the earth stay quiet
And moves around all the remaining skies,
Takes from here its beginning by just right:

And this sky in none other region lies
Than in the mind of God, where are alight
The love that spins it and all virtuous guise.

It ‘s encircl’d all round by love and light,
As this one circles each; and only he
Who this circle encloses has the might

To comprehend it, whose motion can’t be
Measur’d by others; all, nay, measure take
From this, as ten from five and two get we.

And as the roots of time derive their make
From this sky, and its open fronds are spread
In others, now thy reason can partake.

O wicked greed that under thee so tread
The mortals, that no one can raise his eyes
Above thy waves, and wholly astray is led!

Good will, it ‘s true, in man flowers and lies;
But steady rain converts good plums in fruits
That lack sweet taste, food fit only for flies.

Faith, with innocence, only children suits;
Afterward each of them takes flight, before
The cheeks are cover’d by the first hairs’ roots.

Some, still babbling, are fasting, who evermore
Afterward, when their tongue is apt, devour
Any food, caring not what the moon bore;
Some to their mother, in their babbling hour,
Listen with love, who, reaching their full say,
Desire to see her dead with wish most sour.

Thus in its hue to black be changed may
The white-coloured skin, when the fair lass
Daughter of sun first crosses each man's way.

And, so that wonder won't thy mind harass,
Consider that on earth no rule holds sway;
Thus the human corruption's come to pass.

But ere all out of winter's weather may
January come for the neglected part
Of year, these upper circles shall send ray

Such, that the long await'd Fortune will start
To turn the sterns where now the ships' prows lie,
So that the fleet shall run with straighter art;

And, after flowers, shall true fruits come by."
Twenty-eighth Chant

And thus against the wretched mortals’ ways
Of present life had shewn the truth and right
She who the path to Paradise out lays

For me. Then, as in mirror sees the light
Of candle’s flame man on whose back it shines,
Ere it falls on his thoughts or on his sight,

And turns he, to look whether what defines
The glass is true, and learns it wholly agrees
With real things, as note with tune aligns;

Thus, looking back, my own memory sees
I acted, gazing into the fair eyes
From which Love spun the ropes pulling my knees.

And as I turned and I was made wise
To what appears in that revolving sphere,
If keenly should one look inside those skies,

I saw a point radiating such a shear
Keen blaze, that any eye by it imping’d
It behoves be shut tight by the daz’d seer;

And any star with smallest extent ting’d
Would look as moon to that non-extant size,
If next to it, as star with star, be string’d.

Methinks as much as near the sun there lies
The halo by its light painted, when more
Thickly waft vapours bound to give it rise,

That much remov’d from that radiating core
A flaming circle saw I turn so fast,
The speediest sky it could have run afore.

And around this a larger ring was cast,
And this in turn by a third one was girt,
Then by a fourth, a fifth, a sixth; and past

This there follow’d a seventh, to such skirt
Enlarged, that the rainbow, Juno’s page,
It hardly to contain could I assert.

Then an eighth and a ninth all them would cage;
And each with slower spin turned, as stood
Farther removed from that first fast stage;

And each a sheerer flame display’d -as could
More take its truth from that unblemish’d spark,
Methinks- the closer to the centre ’twould

Spin. Said my lady, seeing me in the dark
To lie suspended: “From that central point
The sky, and Nature all, their essence hark.

Methinks- the closer to the centre ’twould spin.

Said my lady, seeing me in the dark
To lie suspended: “From that central point
The sky, and Nature all, their essence hark.
Look at the circle more with it conjoin'd;  
And learn that is its motion all that fast  
Because by sting of fiery love it 's join'd."

And I to her: “If our world were cast  
In the order in these wheels I discern,  
Thy food would fill my hunger to the last;

But in the world of senses our concern  
Sees the skies more and more divine to be,  
As farther from the centre they secern.

For which, if end to this desire of me  
Is to be had in this angelic temple  
Whose bounds but love and light ever decree,

It behoves me to hear as can the example  
And the model differ in such a way,  
For vainly I try to ford a gulf so ample.”

“If thy fingers are weak to untie the lay  
Of this knot, it 's no wonder; for that much,  
Never having been pried, tight will stay!”

Thus my lady; then said she: “Now take such  
Words as I 'll tell, thy present wish to sate;  
Then around them exert thy own wit’s touch.

The world’s corporeal rings take size and rate  
According to the virtue more or less  
Diffused through their parts, on them to wait.

Larger virtues greater effects express;  
Greater body larger effects contains,  
If full perfection all its parts access.

Thus the sky that all other worlds entrains  
With faster spin, mirrors the circle here  
Loving more and on which more wisdom rains.

For this, provided all around thou steer  
Thy wit to virtues, not to size, of those  
Substances that as circles now appear,

Thou shalt well see to correspond in close  
Harmony, more to more, and less to less,  
Skies with circles that angels’ wits enclose.”

As remains full of radiance and cloudless  
The vault of air, when Boreas blows from side  
Of his mouth whence the mildest winds digress,

For which is purg’d of all foul mist the wide  
Expanse formerly soil’d, so that the sky  
Regains in all its parts fair smiling pride,

Thus after those clear words was brighten’d I,  
Since the truth as a star in sky was seen,  
Thanks to my lady’s revealing reply.
And as her words had ceased, then with keen
Ardour the circles sparkled, not unlike
A boiling, incandescent irons’ screen.

Each spark with equal fire the eye would strike,
In number such, more than the thousands made
Doubling across chessboard their throng is like.

I hear songs of “Hosanna” being plaid
From choir to choir, toward the point that keeps
Now and forever each to its own glade.

And she who sees through any doubt which creeps
Into me, says: “Seraphs and Cherubs were
Shewn by the first two circles thy sight reaps.

With such speed by their ties they are spun there,
‘Cau’s to the point as much alike they seem
As they can; and their might is great as their

Sublime aspect. The loves that next them gleam
Are called Thrones as mirrors of God’s look,
For which they end the first ternary team.

And learn that all their pleasure take, and took,
As much as their own sights fathom the abyss
In which every wit of peace partook.

Hence thou canst see that each blessed soul’s bliss
Rests on the act of contemplating, ere
Than loving, which without such sight it ’d miss;

And of this sight the deserts of the seer
Are measure, bringing forth good will and grace:
Thus from rung to next rung proceeds one here.

In this eternal spring’s resplendent space
That by nocturnal Aries cannot be
Despoiled, claims next triad pride of place,

Winter dispelling forever with three
Melodies of “Hosanna”, which resound
In the three orders whence thrice comes their glee.

Three deities in this hierarchy are bound:
Dominations and Virtues, and, as last
Order, Angelic Powers’ is third found.

Two of the triad which rejoices past,
Principalties first, Archangels then
Spin; in the end the Angels their feasts cast.

All these orders upward direct their ken,
And they steer things below, so that they all
Are drawn to God, and draw to Him. And when

Dionysius let desire his wit to enthrall
In contemplating those, he gave them name
And disposition as I here them call.
Other knowledge did, though, Gregorius claim
Later, so that, when he open'd his eyes
In this sky, at himself, laughing, took aim.

And that such truth in mortal writing lies
I 'd rather thou not marvel at, because
Paul, who saw not but this within these skies
Spinning, to him on earth could all disclose.”
Twenty-ninth Chant

When Leto's both offsprings the same zone share
-Cover'd by Aries' and by Libra's signs-
Of the horizon, rising or setting there,
As much time as each, pois'd in balance, shines
Equally from the zenith far, until
Each with new hemisphere its lamp aligns,
That long, her face suffus'd with laughter, still
And silent was Beatrice, who point'd her face
Toward what earlier fully won my will.

Then she began: "Unasked my speech says
What thou now wish to hear, for I have seen
It where every where and when take place.
Not to add good to his eternal sheen
-For this can never be- but that such may,
Reflected, shine and say: 'In thee I 've been',
In his timeless existence -which out lay,
Too, of any other bound-, as he was pleas'd,
The eternal love lent to new loves his ray.

Nor was he earlier slumbering appeas'd;
For neither ere not later hover'd he
Over these waters, by his spirit creas'd.
Form and matter, conjoin'd and pure, would be
Sent forth to faultless being, as are sent
From a three-stringed bow arrows by three.
Ray which in glass, amber or crystal went
Shines in such way that from its coming in
To its being inside no time is spent;
Thus the threefold issuance from within
God's mind radiated all at once, nor had
Beginning, end and middle point to spin.
With them their order from God's mind was read;
And those creatures were on world's top, in which
Pure act was breath'd; potential ones instead
Went to the lowest rung; the middle pitch
Was the union of act and seed, with tie
So strong, no one can make untied such stitch.
A long time, wrote Hyeronimus, went by
After angels' creation, ere the rest
Of the world in its form was made to lie;
But my truth is assever'd by the best
Text, which is the Holy Ghost's Bible; and thou
Shalt this perceive too, if thy own wit test;
And reason too sees the same truth somehow,  
For to have stay’d so long the movers prime  
Unperfected it could not conceive how.

Now thou hast known the place and known the time  
And the way were creat’d these loves; three yet  
Of thy ardent desires put off my rhyme.

Nor could reach twenty a man, counting, ere set  
Were a part of the angels to bring fight  
To the creation, and your world to upset.

The rest remain’d in fealty, and this bright  
Art learnt, that thou discern with so large glee,  
Of circling round the centre of all light.

The beginning of fall was the proud he  
Accursed, whom thou saw in deepest pit  
By all world’s weights ever constrain’d to be.

Those thou see here, with unassuming wit  
Recognized they were from supreme good  
Made ready thus to intend Creator’s writ;

For which their own insight by God’s act would  
Be exalted, lighting grace and their deserts  
Thanks to; so firm and full their will then stood.

And I want thee doubt not, as love exerts  
Openly itself, thus deserve the receiving  
The grace through which in them God love asserts.

Now at last thou can learn, by thy perceiving  
Alone, many more things from the angels’ throng,  
If my words found right place in thy conceiving.

But since on earth in your schools is taught wrong,  
That the angels’ nature ‘s made such as to give  
Them intellect, recall and will, not long

Speech will make this -so in thy mind can live  
The pure truth which down there, befuddled, yields  
To false readings- pass through my knowledge’s sieve.

These beings from God’s face, that nothing shields  
From them, never sever’d their own rapt gaze,  
Ever since such a sight in them joy builds:

Therefore their sight new objects will not faze,  
So that they never need recall to mind  
Past things remov’d or in oblivion’s haze.

Thus it is clear that down on earth you grind,  
Though wakeful, dreams, thinking or not say true  
Things; but in latter deed shameful guilt find.

Not on a single path proceeds your view,  
O philosophers; thus you are waylaid  
By vanity and by love of all things new!
And still this is displeasing in less grade,
Up here, than when the Holy Scripture’s book
Is set aside, or its meaning is made
Twisted. You little think how much blood took
To sow it in the world, and how much grace
Acquire those who of it humbly partook.
To grow in fame each one hastens its pace
In making up false stories, which are told
By preachers, where is lost all Gospels’ trace.
One says the moon retrac’d backwards its old
Path at Christ’s passion, and went in between
Earth and the Sun, whose rays could not unfold;
And lies, for the Sun’s light fail’d to be seen
In Spain and India too, not by the Jews
Alone; which could not come from the Moon’s screen.
Not as many nam’d Lapo or Bindo shews
Florence, as are narrated in a year
Fables hither and thither, or false news,
From pulpits; thus the wretched sheep, who hear
Unknowing, come away with vain wind fed,
Nor are excused that lies don’t appear.
Christ did not tell to those by him first led:
‘Go, and preach to the world nonsense’; nay, he
Gave to their preaching the most truthful bed.
And this much sounded in their mouth, to be
Made into swords and lances, with which fight
For the Gospel, to make all true faith see.
Now man tries with some witticism make bright
The preaching, and as long as is assur’d
The merriment, his pride-blown hood will spite
All else. But such dark bird is there immur’d
That, should the lowly folks see it, they would
See how trustworthy are pardons assur’d;
For which earth’s crowds so gullible have stood,
That without any witness’ proof they ’d run
After whichever promise of some good.
Of this Anthony’s pig grows fat: but one
Of many more whose swinish nature ’s hid,
Who pay in money they with false die pun.
But bring thy eyes back to straight way, for did
This long digression take us far astray;
And in short time new paths forward us bid.
This angels’ nature in so large array
Was created, no mortal word or thought
Can presume such a large number assay;
And should thou look at what said Daniel, ought
To see that in his thousands hidden lies
A number which no definite count wrought.

The first light in as many diverse dyes
Is receiv’d by this throng immers’d in it,
As there are splendours into which it ties.

Therefore, since to reception in their wit
Follows their love of God’s sweetness, degree
Diverse of heat or warmth to take is fit.

Now canst at last the height and breadth thou see
Of the everlasting value, since he laid
So many mirrors into which to be
Refract’d, though one and whole he ever bade.”
Methinks six thousand miles from us remov’d
The sixth hour warms the day, and the hemisphere’s
Shadow has to the horizon nearly mov’d,
When the middle of sky which most appears
High above us begins to pale, and fade
Some stars, dimming their look to earthly seers;

And as advances the resplendent maid
Of sun farther and farther, are foreclos’d
More and more lights, until the fairest ’s laid
Out of sight. Thus the joyfully dispos’d
Triumph circling the point that won my sense,
From its content in appearance enclos’d,

Little by little lost its hue, and hence
Nothing to see and love perforce made me
To Beatrice turn again my glance.
If all I said till here of her could be
All circumscrib’d in but one praise, this would
Seem puny thing to express how looked she.
The beauty I saw transcends not but the good
We can enjoy; nay, -I am sure- alone
Her Maker such a rapture endure could.

By this myself I confess won as none,
Amongst writers of tragedy or play,
Was surpass’d by the theme that was his own;
For, as on shaky sight acts the sun’s ray,
Thus the recall of her sweet smile now makes
From my mind all wit’s powers slide away.

Until this sight, from which my heart now aches
-And since the day I first beheld her face-, My song could somehow follow, though it takes
More than I can; but now it ’s fit it lays
Down the effort to tell her beauty in verse,
As each artist behoves who too far strays.

In such aspect as must needs leave my terse
Lyre to a better one -while my hard task
I am near to conclude, despite the adverse
Odds- she began again, with voice and mask
Of an assured leader: “We ’re outside
The greatest body, and in the sky we bask
That is pure light; mind’s light, wherein abide
All loves; love of true good, full of delight;
Delight which any sweetness pales beside.
Of Paradise thou shalt have here in sight
Both hosts, and one of them in the same look
Thou shalt behold in the Last Judgement's rite."

As sudden flash that seeing spirits shook
And scattered, so is prevent'd the eye
From perceiving some stronger sight, thus took

Me all around a blinding light; and I
Was left all swathed in so intense a haze
Of its sheen, nothing else was seen nearby.

“Ever the love which this sky to quiet lays
In its own midst with such greeting receiv'd,
To make the candle apt to burn at its rays.”

No sooner were inside my mind perceiv'd
These short words, than were rais'd above my own
Virtues all thoughts and feelings I conceiv'd.

And I was lit by new sight, which would hone
My sense so much, that no sheen is so bright
Whose glare my eye could not sustain alone.

And I saw then, form'd as a stream, a light
Of sheerest flowing blaze, between two banks
Which a fair spring paint'd with resplendent sight.

From that river live sparks issued in ranks,
And they flock'd to the blooms on either side,
Like rubies set in gold. With joyful pranks,

As if made drunken by the scents inside,
Then they plunged anew within the fair
Whirling pool; and as many went to abide

Into it, as came out. “The wish thou bear,
Burning to know what means this sublime sight,
Pleases me all the more, the more it 'll flare;

But it behoves thee of this liquid light
To drink some, ere thy thirst thou can abate”.
Thus the sun of my eyes spake clear and bright.

She added too: “This stream and these gems great
Coming and going, with the banks' smiles fair,
Are but shadows that hint at their truth's weight.

Not that unripeness can these things impair;
Nay, the wanting is laid at thy own door,
For at sights so sublime thou can't yet stare.”

There is no suckling that to milk is more
Ready to turn his face, if he should 'wake
Much later than he 's wont to be car'd for,

As I turn'd then, better mirrors to make
Of my eyes, bending down toward the stream
Deriv'd from God, where souls betterment take;
And as soon as my lids had drunk its beam,
Frowning, at once it seem'd to me to change
From a straight length to a round expanse of gleam.

Then, like folks ere dissembled under strange
Disguise, so as other to look, if they
Divest that semblance of an alien range,

Thus were chang'd into much more festive lay
The blooms and sparks, so that open I saw
Both courts of Heaven before me to stay.

O God's high splendour, thanks to which I saw
That highest triumph of Thy truthful reign,
Give me the virtue to tell what I saw!

Up there that blazing stream is making plain
Their Maker to all creatures in His sight
Alone finding appeasement of all strain.

In circle's figure is spread out its light,
Wide so much, that its rim too large a band
Would be to the sun's girth. Of all that site

The semblance 's made of rays sent by God's hand,
On the Prime Mover's top reflected, whence
Takes life and might its everlasting stand.

And as a slope's mirror'd reflections dance
In waters at its feet, as to let see
Adorn'd by blooms and green its rising stance,

Thus, overlooking all around that sea
Of light from grades by thousands, I saw plain
Those of us who swarm'd up mirror'd to be.

And if the lowest grade can well contain
So wide a lake, what can be the size
Of such a rose in leaves outermost lain!

My sight, though, was not won by width and rise
Of the rose, nay, it took with ease inside
Quality and girth in which that mirth all lies.

Near and far cannot, there, augment nor hide;
For, where God's immediate command has sway,
Effects of Nature's laws are put aside.

The eternal rose's yellow heart where lay,
To swell and rise in grades, redolent praise
To the Sun sending spring's unending ray,

Drew me Beatrice, as man who cannot raise
Voice to speak, and told me: "Look how extended
The convent of white robes spreads in thy gaze!

See how far our town's frontiers are distended:
See our seats, of blest ones so replete,
Few people more could to the list be appended.
And, should thou look toward that larger seat
Where a crown is already set, learn how
-Before at this high banquet thou can eat-

Will sit on it the soul, august since now
On earth, of the great Henry, to redress
Sent, ere she can be ready, Italy's prow.

Blind cupidity bewitching ye, not less
Made ye fools than the suckling who, though dying
Of hunger, to the tit won't have access.

And will preside over God's Church such lying
Shepherd then, that with Henry he will not keep
A same open and covert face. His trying
Ways shall be but short time suffered: deep
He shall be thrust, from saint office unseated,
There where the magus Simon had to creep;
Thus lower place to Anagni's one 'll be meted."
Thirty-first Chant

In shape of a white rose shew’d itself wide
Open to me the holy army of the blest,
Which Christ in his own blood had made his bride;

But the other troops who flying without rest
See and sing out the glory of him they love
And the kindness that rais’d them to the best

-As a huge swarm of bees in flowers’ cove
Now dives and now returns toward the place
Where its labours to take sweet flavour strove-,

Thus inside the great flower div’d apace,
Amid the many leaves’ beauties, and rose
Thence again where their love always finds space.

Their faces were as flames without repose,
The wings all gold, and the remaining white
So, that no snow nears with its whiteness those.

They brought with them the peace and the ardour bright
Acquir’d in beating wings upward, when they
Went down, inside the rose, from site to site.

Nor, for swarming between the supreme ray
And the flower, did such a flying throng
Impede the sight or dim the flaming day;

For the splendour divine so seeps along
All the universe according to desert,
Nothing can hinder it, however strong.

This safe and joyous realm, forever pert
With sight and love toward a single aim,
To hold new and old crowds I then averr’d.

O triple light that in a single flame
Sparkling in front of them, so them appease!
Would that in our fierce storm thou hear our claim!

If the barbarians, coming to mild breeze
From the lands cover’d by the major bear
Spinning with her lov’d cub, in cruel freeze,

To Rome’s stately mansions had to stare
In wonder, when her hills’ high buildings went
Above all that a mortal thought could dare,

I, to divine from man’s condition sent,
Passing from time to eternity, and ascended
From Florence to sane people justly bent,

With what wonder should have such things attended?
For sure wonder and joy made to me nice
That neither mine nor others’ voice be intended.
And, as the covet'd temple's walls entice
The pilgrim, who enjoys strolling 'round in it,
Hoping to tell its beauties beyond price,
Stepping from light to lively light, 'twas fit
I send my gaze hither and thither, down
And up and through all levels circling it.

Charity-inspiring faces in that town
I saw, adorn'd by alien smile and light,
Shap'd by dignity worth of high renown.

I had already enclos'd within my sight
The overall form of Paradise, but faill'd
To fix it firmly on any single site;

And, to her turning, with live wish I hail'd
My lady, to ask her on things that vied
With my reason, for them by doubts assail'd.

I look'd for one, and another replied;
In place of Beatrice I saw an old man
Clad as the glorious folks seated upside.

Benign happiness' colours overran
His eyes and cheeks, in pious semblance cast,
As in sweet father's looks appraise we can.

And “Where is she?” at once I said, and fast
He answer'd: “Thy desire to satisfy
Beatrice call'd me down; if thou look past

Me to the third round circle from the high
Grade, her thou 'll see again, seat'd on the place
Which her deserts made her worth to occupy”.

Without answer, I rais'd my eyes and face,
And saw a crown of light her to surround,
For she reflect'd the eternal rays of grace.

From the high region where the thunders sound
To the deepest abyss down in the sea,
No vaster spans a mortal eye confound

Than from me to Beatrice appear'd to be;
But naught it matter'd, for her looks down came
To me of air admixture wholly free.

“O woman of my hope deserving name,
Who bore for my salvation to leave trace
Of thy feet in the hellish realm of shame,
Of all the things seen in my journey's space,
From thy might and thy goodness I 'm aware
Could only come virtuous content and grace.

Thou from serfdom drew me to breathe free air
Through all the ways and all the means in thy
Power, and through thy unrelenting care.
Save evermore for me thy bounty; my
Soul, which thou made abandon the sins' bond,
Will thus pleasant to thee from body untie."

Thus I prayed; and she, though far beyond
As my sight shewed, smil'd and look'd at me;
Then she return'd to drink the eternal pond.

The saintly old man "So" said "that perfect be
Thy journey, to guide which I was now sent
By holy prays and holy love, to see
With flying gaze this garden should be bent
Thy eyes; for, seeing this, to thine own sight
Readiness to sustain God's ray 'll be lent.

And Heaven's queen, for whom of love most bright
I burn within, shall not deny her grace:
Bernard I am, faithful to her splendid light."

As is the man who, from remotest space
Come to admire our Veronica's saint shroud,
For old hunger cannot be sat'd, that face
Gazing and all the while thinking out loud:
"O my Lord Jesus Christ, true God and light,
See I thy very image as through a cloud?";

Thus wonder'd I, admiring such a bright
Charity in him who in our world, gone deep
In contemplation, of God's peace gain'd sight.

He began then: "Thou 'll not, son of grace, reap
Knowledge of this most happy state, as long
As thy eyes on this low level thou 'll keep;
But stare up at the circles, all along
To the farthest, until thou 'll see the queen
Of whom is devout subject all this throng."

I rais'd my eyes; and as in morn the sheen
Of the eastern part of sky by far surpasses
That of the side where the sunset has been,
Thus, almost as if mounting to high passes
From the plain with my eyes, up in the extreme
Point I saw a light winning those shining masses.

And, as where man awaits the first bright beam
From the cart which ill drove Phaeton, more
Take fire the skies, and dim on the sides seem,
Thus that peaceful flaming at its core
Was livelier, while evenly at each side,
Farther proceeding, less and less bright wore.

And in that spot, with spread out wings, there ride
A throng of thousand angels in joy wild,
And distinct are in each motion and hide.
I saw there in their play and song a mild
Smiling beauty, that gave a happy look
To the eyes of the saints who all round pil'd.

And, might I find the words in this my book
As vivid as the images I keep in mind,
I 'd dare not write the least delight I took.

Bernard, as he perceiv'd my eyes to find
Their fixed object in that fervent heat,
His own turned to her with love so kind,

As made mine of more ardent stare the seat.
Thirty-second Chant

That contemplating soul, fix’d on his pleasure,
A mentor’s office freely took and said,
Beginning, these saint words for me to treasure:

“The sore anoint’d and heal’d through Mary’s aid
Was pricked open by that woman fair
Who close at Mary’s feet has her place laid.

The third order of seats thou see to share,
Below Eve, Beatrice with the saint
Woman Rachel, content at truth to stare.

And downward hence from grade to grade, as paint
I with their proper name them, of the rose
Going along the petals, will be gain’d

By thee the sight of Sarah and Judith; close
Dwell Rebecca, with her whose great grandson
Said “Miserere mei” to find repose

From guilt. And from the seventh grade down on,
As above it, women of Jew lineage
Align and split in twain the leaves thereon;

‘Cause, according to the respective age
Of faith shewn to the Christ, are part’d the stairs
Sacred, by such a wall, in twofold stage.

On the side where all ripe its petals bears
The flower, sit the blessed souls who ’d set
On Christ, ere He would come, their hopes and cares;

On the other side, where voids are to be met
Along the semicircles, have their seat
Those who to Christ after His birth were let.

And as near us the two blest cohorts meet
At the place of the Virgin and of those
With whom the parting follows at her feet,

Thus in front the same bound is seen to appose
John great, who martyrdom and wasteland bore
Ever, ere Hell two years would him enclose;

And the line below him plunges more and more
With Francis, Benedict and Austin blest,
And others down and down, till the grades’ core.

Now marvel at high God’s providence, lest
In diverse measure one and the other side
Of faith should fill one and the other nest.

And learn that not for own deserts abide
The souls below the ring that cuts in twain
The two hemicycles the twin walls thus stride;
Nay, for other souls' merits there have lain,
Under conditions, for absolv'd they were,
All, ere they could have chosen truly and fain.

Well thou can this perceive looking at their
Childish traits and their voices' hearing too
The sound, if to take heed of them thou care.

Now thou doubt, and in doubt art silent; do
Be assur'd I shall untie the tight hard knot
Made by the subtle thoughts that thy wit woo.

Within this realm's wide-laid expanse cannot
Chance hold a place, more than can here hold sway
Sadness, thirst, hunger, feeling cold or hot.

'Cause by eternal law all that thou may
See here has been establish'd as it must
Be, as ring on a finger fit should stay.

Therefore these throngs that have been turn'd to dust
Hurriedly, to true life among their peers
Did not come here without good cause and just.

The king after whose will this realm such cheers
Enjoys, and such great love, so much that none
Could dare wish to ask more, creates and steers

All intellects in His rejoicing own
Look, and endows them all with diverse grace
At His whim; and suffice this fact alone.

And this is said, and leaves abundant trace,
In the Holy Writ, when speaking of those twins
Whose fight even inside the womb took place.

Therefore the highest light worthily pins
High or low cap on kids as it is fit,
According to the grace their hair's hue wins.

And thus, without by their deserts being lit,
Are they allott'd to each different rung,
Differing but in first divine keen writ.

It was enough, in ages newly strung,
But parents' faith, conjoined to the offspring's
Innocence, for salvation to be wrung.

After the pristine ages ran out, the wings
Of the innocents male souls had to purchase
With circumcision strength to reach these rings.

But since the time of Grace had come, to base
Limbo's den such innocents were confin'd,
Should death without Christ's baptism be their case.

But now let at long last thy gaze be align'd
On the face that most Christ's resembles, for
Its light alone can make thy sight refin'd.
Enough to see the Christ.” Ne’er saw I more Cheers than on her were raining, clearly shown In the saint souls creat’d to fly before

Such summit; nor any other sight my own Eyes had beheld suspended me with such Wonder, nor made as much of God be known.

And that love that went down for God to vouch, “Ave Maria, gratia plena” in keen Tune singing, before her stretch’d out -wide much-

His wings. Answer’d the song of the angels’ dean From all sides the bless’d court, for which their look Over all grades was made still more serene.

“O saint father, who gladly for me took To stay down here, leaving thy sweet abode Where thy seat is decreed in God’s bless’d book,

Tell me what angel so festively strode Before our Queen, looking her in the eyes, Enamour’d so, in fire it seems he rode.”

Thus I called again upon the wise Spirit whom Mary’s sight was beautifying As are made fair morn stars by the sunrise.

And he to me: “Boldness and beauty lying In angel or in soul as much as may, All are in him, fittingly signifying,

After our wish, that he was grac’d to lay The palm in front of Mary, when God’s son Chose to be encumber’d by our mortal way.

But as I go on speaking, come anon With thine eyes, the patrician souls to see That this most pious, just kingdom shine upon.

Those two sitting up there with deeper glee For being next to the august Lady, may Of this flower the twain roots said to be:

He who sidles to her on left hand way Is the father for whose rash taste mankind Such bitter food has been decreed to assay;

On her right side that old father thou ’ll find Of the Holy Church, to whom Christ twofold key Entrusted, this fair rose to unlock or bind.

And him who saw all the hard times to be, Ere his demise, of the fair bride acquired With the spear and the nails, as thou can see, Along the latter sits; near Adam, tired Moses rests, under whom manna-fed went The ungrateful breed in whimsy aversion mired.
In front of Peter Hanna sits, content
So much of looking at her daughter, she
Does not blink eye, while “Hosanna” she’s bent

On singing. And in front of Adam see
Lucy to sit, who sent thy lady down
To thine help, when on ruinous path thou’d flee.

But since runs out the time thou in this town
Can be vigil, we shall here end our say,
As good tailor to cloth suits width of gown;

And to first Love let now our eyes take way,
So that, by looking toward Him, inside
His blazing thou can plunge deep as one may.

But, lest thou be brought back by the weak stride
Of thy wings, while believing to proceed,
It behoves asking grace in pray to bide;

Grace from her who can help thee in thy need;
And thou shalt follow me with thine affection,
So that thy heart after my words shall speed.”

And of this holy pray he made election:
“Thirty-third Chant

Virgin mother, of thy Son offspring,
Humble and haughty more than all create
Being, of eternal counsel steady spring,

Thou art the woman who the human fate
Ennobled so, that its creator thought
Fit to be cast by her in human state.

In thy womb love was kindled; its warmth brought
In everlasting peace its fruit to grow;
Thus sprout’d and bloom’d this flower so long sought.

Here thou art to us all meridian glow
Of charity, and a lively spring of hope
Thou art for mortal throngs on earth down low.

Lady, thou hast such worth, that men in mope
Seeking grace, should they not address their prays
To thee, demand be hoisted without rope.

Thy benign nature helps not but whom lays
In front of thee his pains; nay, many a time
Freely foreruns the needs ere them man says.

In thee mercy, in thee piety, in thee clime
Of wondrousness, in thee are gather’d all
Things that in creatures with good feelings rhyme.

Now this man, who from basest hollow stall
Of the universe till here came, seeing in way
Spiritual lives of most diverse a call,

Beseeches from thee, as grace, in devout pray
That much of virtue, as to allow him raise
Himself still more, to reach the last safe bay.

And I, who never burn’d to push my gaze
On high as much as for him now, entreat
Thee all I can -and may be enough my prays-

That all his clouds of mortal bounds thou beat
Back with thy holy orations, so he may
Of highest pleasure fully enjoy the treat.

Still, my queen who can all thou wish, I pray
Thee that thou should preserve his feelings sane
After visions so great before him lay.

May thy vigil defeat the all too mundane
Motions of him: see Beatrice and those
Blessed cohort join hands in plea most plain!”

The eyes which God to love and honour chose,
Fixed on him who spake, shew’d in clear sight
How much she priz’d such prays that devout rose;
Then they were rais’d toward the eternal light,
Into which it cannot be thought that could
Of looking straight a creature have the right.

And I, who near the end of all wish stood,
Crown’d in that point my longing’s ardent peak,
As if to accomplish pressing duty I should.

Bernard with smiling nods seemed to speak
To me so I raise my gaze: but I had done
Already of my own will what he did seek;

‘Cause in my sight, made more and more pure, shone
-Entering by degrees- the shining ray
Of the high light that is true sheen alone.

Henceforth what I saw was by long way
Greater than mortal speech, which yields to such
Vision, as yields recall to such foray.

As a man who in sleep with sight and touch
Dreams, and on waking the feeling impress’d
Retains, and for the rest his mind can’t vouch,

Thus am I, for my vision near recess’d
I find, and yet my heart is fondly reel’d
By the sweetness which through that sight access’d.

Thus the snow by sun’s rays is made unseal’d;
Thus the wind on thin leaves away would shove
Omens for which to Sibyl men appeal’d.

O highest sheen that rose so far above
Our mortal concept, lend my wit again
A small speck of thy likeness: in thy love

Deign make my tongue so powerful, a plain
Mere spark of thy full glory I saw might I
Bequeath to future folks for their souls’ gain;

For, should it be recall’d somewhat to my
Memory and should it sound feebly in my song,
More folks shall be thy victory known by.

I think, for the keen virtues that belong
To the live light, I ’d have been led astray,
Had my eyes been sever’d from it. And long

I was thus bold to bear the blinding ray,
I recall, to the point that I conjoin’d
My sight with boundless might beyond all say.

O grace plentiful, which did me anoint
So, that I dar’d push deep my gaze inside
The eternal sheen, which all my sight purloin’d!

In its depth saw I bound from ev’ry side,
Tightly constrain’d by love in single space,
All that throughout the world is spread out wide;
Both substance and appearance with their ways,
Nearly fused together, in such guise
That hardly a shade of it my poor verse says.

Of this knot the universal shape did rise,
Methinks, in front of me, because I seem,
While I say this, with wider joy grow wise.

That instant is to me far longer dream
Than centuries to Argus’ venture, when
Its wake left on the sea such wondrous seam.

Thus my mind, all suspended, rested then
In steady rapture, motionless, intent,
And ever more desir’d to sate its ken.

In that light is man’s nature so far bent,
That to divert one’s gaze elsewhere would be
Thing to which never could the soul consent;

For the good that is will’s object and glee
Is all gather’d in it, and what is there
Perfect, in other things faulty thou ‘d see.

Henceforth more lame shall be my words, to bear
Witness but to what I recall, than tongue
Of suckling fed at breast by mother’s care;

Not because more than one look came along
Contained in the live beam which I gaz’d,
For changeless it stays for all aeons long;

But for the increasing virtue which, amaz’d,
My sight gained, a lone appearance would
Different by my changing wits be apprais’d.

Into the deep and clear substance I could
Discern that in the high gleam three perfect rounds
Of the same size and of three colours stood;

And, as rainbow from rainbow, there rebounds
From two of them the image, and the third seem’d
A flame evenly darting from their bounds.

Alas, how short ‘s my say, and how hoarse deem’d,
To my conception! and, to what I saw,
To be told ‘scarce’ my words would be redeem’d.

O eternal light that lone sit in thy law,
Alone intend thyself, and by thee intended
And intending enjoy love without flaw!

The circle that, thus conceived, distended
In thee the image as a reflected light,
By mine eyes for some time observed, tended

To shew within its selfsame colour bright,
As I judged, our likeness in its look;
For which on it I fix’d the whole my sight.
As all the rest in geometry forsook
He who quests for the circle’s ratio, in vain
Looking for what he wants, such thirst me took

To know, looking at that new sight in pain;
I wanted to discern how could well fit
The image into the circle, and how the twain

Were fused, but my feathers short of it
Fell: though, my mind was hit and taken in
By a flash in whose sheen was sat’d my wit.

The high vision no longer shone within;
But pull’d already my longing and will,
As wheel put into the most even spin,

The love whose pull Sun and the stars fulfil.
THE END