

“O Thou!” her words she thus without delay
Resuming, turn’d their point on me, to whom
They but with lateral edge seem’d harsh before,
“Say thou, who stand’st beyond the holy stream,
If this be true. A charge so grievous needs
Thine own avowal.” On my faculty
Such strange amazement hung, the voice expir’d
Imperfect, ere its organs gave it birth.

A little space refraining, then she spake:
“What dost thou muse on? Answer me. The wave
On thy remembrances of evil yet
Hath done no injury.” A mingled sense
Of fear and of confusion, from my lips
Did such a “Yea” produce, as needed help
Of vision to interpret. As when breaks
In act to be discharg’d, a cross-bow bent
Beyond its pitch, both nerve and bow o’erstretch’d,
The flagging weapon feebly hits the mark;
Thus, tears and sighs forth gushing, did I burst
Beneath the heavy load, and thus my voice
Was slacken’d on its way. She straight began:
“When my desire invited thee to love
The good, which sets a bound to our aspirings,
What bar of thwarting foss or linked chain
Did meet thee, that thou so should’st quit the hope
Of further progress, or what bait of ease

Or promise of allurements led thee on
Elsewhere, that thou elsewhere should'st rather wait?"

A bitter sigh I drew, then scarce found voice
To answer, hardly to these sounds my lips
Gave utterance, wailing: "Thy fair looks withdrawn,
Things present, with deceitful pleasures, turn'd
My steps aside." She answering spake: "Hadst thou
Been silent, or denied what thou avow'st,
Thou hadst not hid thy sin the more: such eye
Observes it. But whene'er the sinner's cheek
Breaks forth into the precious-streaming tears
Of self-accusing, in our court the wheel
Of justice doth run counter to the edge.
Howe'er that thou may'st profit by thy shame
For errors past, and that henceforth more strength
May arm thee, when thou hear'st the Siren-voice,
Lay thou aside the motive to this grief,
And lend attentive ear, while I unfold
How opposite a way my buried flesh
Should have impell'd thee. Never didst thou spy
In art or nature aught so passing sweet,
As were the limbs, that in their beauteous frame
Enclos'd me, and are scatter'd now in dust.
If sweetest thing thus fail'd thee with my death,
What, afterward, of mortal should thy wish
Have tempted? When thou first hadst felt the dart

Of perishable things, in my departing
For better realms, thy wing thou should'st have prun'd
To follow me, and never stoop'd again
To 'bide a second blow for a slight girl,
Or other gaud as transient and as vain.
The new and inexperience'd bird awaits,
Twice it may be, or thrice, the fowler's aim;
But in the sight of one, whose plumes are full,
In vain the net is spread, the arrow wing'd."

I stood, as children silent and ashamed
Stand, list'ning, with their eyes upon the earth,
Acknowledging their fault and self-condemn'd.
And she resum'd: "If, but to hear thus pains thee,
Raise thou thy beard, and lo! what sight shall do!"

With less reluctance yields a sturdy holm,
Rent from its fibers by a blast, that blows
From off the pole, or from Iarbas' land,
Than I at her behest my visage rais'd:
And thus the face denoting by the beard,
I mark'd the secret sting her words convey'd.

No sooner lifted I mine aspect up,
Than downward sunk that vision I beheld
Of goodly creatures vanish; and mine eyes
Yet unassur'd and wavering, bent their light

On Beatrice. Towards the animal,
Who joins two natures in one form, she turn'd,
And, even under shadow of her veil,
And parted by the verdant rill, that flow'd
Between, in loveliness appear'd as much
Her former self surpassing, as on earth
All others she surpass'd. Remorseful goads
Shot sudden through me. Each thing else, the more
Its love had late beguil'd me, now the more
I Was loathsome. On my heart so keenly smote
The bitter consciousness, that on the ground
O'erpower'd I fell: and what my state was then,
She knows who was the cause. When now my strength
Flow'd back, returning outward from the heart,
The lady, whom alone I first had seen,
I found above me. "Loose me not," she cried:
"Loose not thy hold;" and lo! had dragg'd me high
As to my neck into the stream, while she,
Still as she drew me after, swept along,
Swift as a shuttle, bounding o'er the wave.

The blessed shore approaching then was heard
So sweetly, "Tu asperges me," that I
May not remember, much less tell the sound.
The beauteous dame, her arms expanding, clasp'd
My temples, and immerg'd me, where 't was fit
The wave should drench me: and thence raising up,

Within the fourfold dance of lovely nymphs
Presented me so lav'd, and with their arm
They each did cover me. "Here are we nymphs,
And in the heav'n are stars. Or ever earth
Was visited of Beatrice, we
Appointed for her handmaids, tended on her.
We to her eyes will lead thee; but the light
Of gladness that is in them, well to scan,
Those yonder three, of deeper ken than ours,
Thy sight shall quicken." Thus began their song;
And then they led me to the Gryphon's breast,
While, turn'd toward us, Beatrice stood.
"Spare not thy vision. We have stationed thee
Before the emeralds, whence love erewhile
Hath drawn his weapons on thee." As they spake,
A thousand fervent wishes riveted
Mine eyes upon her beaming eyes, that stood
Still fix'd toward the Gryphon motionless.
As the sun strikes a mirror, even thus
Within those orbs the twofold being, shone,
For ever varying, in one figure now
Reflected, now in other. Reader! muse
How wond'rous in my sight it seem'd to mark
A thing, albeit steadfast in itself,
Yet in its imag'd semblance mutable.

Full of amaze, and joyous, while my soul

Fed on the viand, whereof still desire
Grows with satiety, the other three
With gesture, that declar'd a loftier line,
Advanc'd: to their own carol on they came
Dancing in festive ring angelical.

“Turn, Beatrice!” was their song: “O turn
Thy saintly sight on this thy faithful one,
Who to behold thee many a wearisome pace
Hath measur'd. Gracious at our pray'r vouchsafe
Unveil to him thy cheeks: that he may mark
Thy second beauty, now conceal'd.” O splendour!
O sacred light eternal! who is he
So pale with musing in Pierian shades,
Or with that fount so lavishly imbued,
Whose spirit should not fail him in th' essay
To represent thee such as thou didst seem,
When under cope of the still-chiming heaven
Thou gav'st to open air thy charms reveal'd.