

“Hosanna Sanctus Deus Sabaoth

Superillustrans claritate tua

Felices ignes horum malahoth!”

Thus chanting saw I turn that substance bright

With fourfold lustre to its orb again,

Revolving; and the rest unto their dance

With it mov’d also; and like swiftest sparks,

In sudden distance from my sight were veil’d.

Me doubt possess’d, and “Speak,” it whisper’d me,

“Speak, speak unto thy lady, that she quench

Thy thirst with drops of sweetness.” Yet blank awe,

Which lords it o’er me, even at the sound

Of Beatrice’s name, did bow me down

As one in slumber held. Not long that mood

Beatrice suffer’d: she, with such a smile,

As might have made one blest amid the flames,

Beaming upon me, thus her words began:

“Thou in thy thought art pond’ring (as I deem),

And what I deem is truth how just revenge

Could be with justice punish’d: from which doubt

I soon will free thee; so thou mark my words;

For they of weighty matter shall possess thee.

“That man, who was unborn, himself condemn’d,

And, in himself, all, who since him have liv’d,

His offspring: whence, below, the human kind

Lay sick in grievous error many an age;
Until it pleas'd the Word of God to come
Amongst them down, to his own person joining
The nature, from its Maker far estrang'd,
By the mere act of his eternal love.
Contemplate here the wonder I unfold.
The nature with its Maker thus conjoin'd,
Created first was blameless, pure and good;
But through itself alone was driven forth
From Paradise, because it had eschew'd
The way of truth and life, to evil turn'd.
Ne'er then was penalty so just as that
Inflicted by the cross, if thou regard
The nature in assumption doom'd: ne'er wrong
So great, in reference to him, who took
Such nature on him, and endur'd the doom.
God therefore and the Jews one sentence pleased:
So different effects flow'd from one act,
And heav'n was open'd, though the earth did quake.
Count it not hard henceforth, when thou dost hear
That a just vengeance was by righteous court
Justly reveng'd. But yet I see thy mind
By thought on thought arising sore perplex'd,
And with how vehement desire it asks
Solution of the maze. What I have heard,
Is plain, thou sayst: but wherefore God this way
For our redemption chose, eludes my search.

“Brother! no eye of man not perfected,
Nor fully ripen’d in the flame of love,
May fathom this decree. It is a mark,
In sooth, much aim’d at, and but little kenn’d:
And I will therefore show thee why such way
Was worthiest. The celestial love, that spume
All envying in its bounty, in itself
With such effulgence blazeth, as sends forth
All beauteous things eternal. What distils
Immediate thence, no end of being knows,
Bearing its seal immutably impress’d.
Whatever thence immediate falls, is free,
Free wholly, uncontrollable by power
Of each thing new: by such conformity
More grateful to its author, whose bright beams,
Though all partake their shining, yet in those
Are liveliest, which resemble him the most.
These tokens of pre-eminence on man
Largely bestow’d, if any of them fail,
He needs must forfeit his nobility,
No longer stainless. Sin alone is that,
Which doth disfranchise him, and make unlike
To the chief good; for that its light in him
Is darken’d. And to dignity thus lost
Is no return; unless, where guilt makes void,
He for ill pleasure pay with equal pain.

Your nature, which entirely in its seed
Trangress'd, from these distinctions fell, no less
Than from its state in Paradise; nor means
Found of recovery (search all methods out
As strickly as thou may) save one of these,
The only fords were left through which to wade,
Either that God had of his courtesy
Releas'd him merely, or else man himself
For his own folly by himself aton'd.

“Fix now thine eye, intently as thou canst,
On th' everlasting counsel, and explore,
Instructed by my words, the dread abyss.

“Man in himself had ever lack'd the means
Of satisfaction, for he could not stoop
Obeying, in humility so low,
As high he, disobeying, thought to soar:
And for this reason he had vainly tried
Out of his own sufficiency to pay
The rigid satisfaction. Then behooved
That God should by his own ways lead him back
Unto the life, from whence he fell, restor'd:
By both his ways, I mean, or one alone.
But since the deed is ever priz'd the more,
The more the doer's good intent appears,
Goodness celestial, whose broad signature

Is on the universe, of all its ways
To raise ye up, was fain to leave out none,
Nor aught so vast or so magnificent,
Either for him who gave or who receiv'd
Between the last night and the primal day,
Was or can be. For God more bounty show'd.
Giving himself to make man capable
Of his return to life, than had the terms
Been mere and unconditional release.
And for his justice, every method else
Were all too scant, had not the Son of God
Humbled himself to put on mortal flesh.

"Now, to fulfil each wish of thine, remains
I somewhat further to thy view unfold.
That thou mayst see as clearly as myself.

"I see, thou sayst, the air, the fire I see,
The earth and water, and all things of them
Compounded, to corruption turn, and soon
Dissolve. Yet these were also things create,
Because, if what were told me, had been true
They from corruption had been therefore free.

"The angels, O my brother! and this clime
Wherein thou art, impassible and pure,
I call created, as indeed they are

In their whole being. But the elements,
Which thou hast nam'd, and what of them is made,
Are by created virtue' inform'd: create
Their substance, and create the' informing virtue
In these bright stars, that round them circling move
The soul of every brute and of each plant,
The ray and motion of the sacred lights,
With complex potency attract and turn.
But this our life the' eternal good inspires
Immediate, and enamours of itself;
So that our wishes rest for ever here.

“And hence thou mayst by inference conclude
Our resurrection certain, if thy mind
Consider how the human flesh was fram'd,
When both our parents at the first were made.”