

With equal pace as oxen in the yoke,  
I with that laden spirit journey'd on  
Long as the mild instructor suffer'd me;  
But when he bade me quit him, and proceed  
(For "here," said he, "behooves with sail and oars  
Each man, as best he may, push on his bark"),  
Upright, as one dispos'd for speed, I rais'd  
My body, still in thought submissive bow'd.

I now my leader's track not loth pursued;  
And each had shown how light we far'd along  
When thus he warn'd me: "Bend thine eyesight down:  
For thou to ease the way shall find it good  
To ruminate the bed beneath thy feet."

As in memorial of the buried, drawn  
Upon earth-level tombs, the sculptur'd form  
Of what was once, appears (at sight whereof  
Tears often stream forth by remembrance wak'd,  
Whose sacred stings the piteous only feel),  
So saw I there, but with more curious skill  
Of portraiture o'erwrought, whate'er of space  
From forth the mountain stretches. On one part  
Him I beheld, above all creatures erst  
Created noblest, light'ning fall from heaven:  
On th' other side with bolt celestial pierc'd  
Briareus: cumb'ring earth he lay through dint

Of mortal ice-stroke. The Thymbraean god  
With Mars, I saw, and Pallas, round their sire,  
Arm'd still, and gazing on the giant's limbs  
Strewn o'er th' ethereal field. Nimrod I saw:  
At foot of the stupendous work he stood,  
As if bewilder'd, looking on the crowd  
Leagued in his proud attempt on Sennaar's plain.

O Niobe! in what a trance of woe  
Thee I beheld, upon that highway drawn,  
Sev'n sons on either side thee slain! O Saul!  
How ghastly didst thou look! on thine own sword  
Expiring in Gilboa, from that hour  
Ne'er visited with rain from heav'n or dew!

O fond Arachne! thee I also saw  
Half spider now in anguish crawling up  
Th' unfinish'd web thou weaved'st to thy bane!

O Rehoboam! here thy shape doth seem  
Louring no more defiance! but fear-smote  
With none to chase him in his chariot whirl'd.

Was shown beside upon the solid floor  
How dear Alcmaeon forc'd his mother rate  
That ornament in evil hour receiv'd:  
How in the temple on Sennacherib fell

His sons, and how a corpse they left him there.  
Was shown the scath and cruel mangling made  
By Tomyris on Cyrus, when she cried:  
“Blood thou didst thirst for, take thy fill of blood!”  
Was shown how routed in the battle fled  
Th’ Assyrians, Holofernes slain, and e’en  
The relics of the carnage. Troy I mark’d  
In ashes and in caverns. Oh! how fall’n,  
How abject, Ilion, was thy semblance there!

What master of the pencil or the style  
Had trac’d the shades and lines, that might have made  
The subtlest workman wonder? Dead the dead,  
The living seem’d alive; with clearer view  
His eye beheld not who beheld the truth,  
Than mine what I did tread on, while I went  
Low bending. Now swell out; and with stiff necks  
Pass on, ye sons of Eve! veil not your looks,  
Lest they descry the evil of your path!

I noted not (so busied was my thought)  
How much we now had circled of the mount,  
And of his course yet more the sun had spent,  
When he, who with still wakeful caution went,  
Admonish’d: “Raise thou up thy head: for know  
Time is not now for slow suspense. Behold  
That way an angel hasting towards us! Lo

Where duly the sixth handmaid doth return  
From service on the day. Wear thou in look  
And gesture seemly grace of reverent awe,  
That gladly he may forward us aloft.  
Consider that this day ne'er dawns again."

Time's loss he had so often warn'd me 'gainst,  
I could not miss the scope at which he aim'd.

The goodly shape approach'd us, snowy white  
In vesture, and with visage casting streams  
Of tremulous lustre like the matin star.  
His arms he open'd, then his wings; and spake:  
"Onward: the steps, behold! are near; and now  
Th' ascent is without difficulty gain'd."

A scanty few are they, who when they hear  
Such tidings, hasten. O ye race of men  
Though born to soar, why suffer ye a wind  
So slight to baffle ye? He led us on  
Where the rock parted; here against my front  
Did beat his wings, then promis'd I should fare  
In safety on my way. As to ascend  
That steep, upon whose brow the chapel stands  
(O'er Rubaconte, looking lordly down  
On the well-guided city,) up the right  
Th' impetuous rise is broken by the steps

Carv'd in that old and simple age, when still  
The registry and label rested safe;  
Thus is th' acclivity reliev'd, which here  
Precipitous from the other circuit falls:  
But on each hand the tall cliff presses close.

As ent'ring there we turn'd, voices, in strain  
Ineffable, sang: "Blessed are the poor  
In spirit." Ah how far unlike to these  
The straits of hell; here songs to usher us,  
There shrieks of woe! We climb the holy stairs:  
And lighter to myself by far I seem'd  
Than on the plain before, whence thus I spake:  
"Say, master, of what heavy thing have I  
Been lighten'd, that scarce aught the sense of toil  
Affects me journeying?" He in few replied:  
"When sin's broad characters, that yet remain  
Upon thy temples, though well nigh effac'd,  
Shall be, as one is, all clean razed out,  
Then shall thy feet by heartiness of will  
Be so o'ercome, they not alone shall feel  
No sense of labour, but delight much more  
Shall wait them urg'd along their upward way."

Then like to one, upon whose head is plac'd  
Somewhat he deems not of but from the becks  
Of others as they pass him by; his hand

Lends therefore help to' assure him, searches, finds,  
And well performs such office as the eye  
Wants power to execute: so stretching forth  
The fingers of my right hand, did I find  
Six only of the letters, which his sword  
Who bare the keys had trac'd upon my brow.  
The leader, as he mark'd mine action, smil'd.