

No longer than what time Latona's twins
Cover'd of Libra and the fleecy star,
Together both, girding the' horizon hang,
In even balance from the zenith pois'd,
Till from that verge, each, changing hemisphere,
Part the nice level; e'en so brief a space
Did Beatrice's silence hold. A smile
Was painted on her cheek; and her fix'd gaze
Bent on the point, at which my vision fail'd:
When thus her words resuming she began:
"I speak, nor what thou wouldst inquire demand;
For I have mark'd it, where all time and place
Are present. Not for increase to himself
Of good, which may not be increas'd, but forth
To manifest his glory by its beams,
Inhabiting his own eternity,
Beyond time's limit or what bound soe'er
To circumscribe his being, as he will'd,
Into new natures, like unto himself,
Eternal Love unfolded. Nor before,
As if in dull inaction torpid lay.
For not in process of before or aft
Upon these waters mov'd the Spirit of God.
Simple and mix'd, both form and substance, forth
To perfect being started, like three darts
Shot from a bow three-corded. And as ray
In crystal, glass, and amber, shines entire,

E'en at the moment of its issuing; thus
Did, from th' eternal Sovran, beam entire
His threefold operation, at one act
Produc'd coeval. Yet in order each
Created his due station knew: those highest,
Who pure intelligence were made: mere power
The lowest: in the midst, bound with strict league,
Intelligence and power, unsever'd bond.
Long tract of ages by the angels past,
Ere the creating of another world,
Describ'd on Jerome's pages thou hast seen.
But that what I disclose to thee is true,
Those penmen, whom the Holy Spirit mov'd
In many a passage of their sacred book
Attest; as thou by diligent search shalt find
And reason in some sort discerns the same,
Who scarce would grant the heav'nly ministers
Of their perfection void, so long a space.
Thus when and where these spirits of love were made,
Thou know'st, and how: and knowing hast allay'd
Thy thirst, which from the triple question rose.
Ere one had reckon'd twenty, e'en so soon
Part of the angels fell: and in their fall
Confusion to your elements ensued.
The others kept their station: and this task,
Whereon thou lookst, began with such delight,
That they surcease not ever, day nor night,

Their circling. Of that fatal lapse the cause
Was the curst pride of him, whom thou hast seen
Pent with the world's incumbrance. Those, whom here
Thou seest, were lowly to confess themselves
Of his free bounty, who had made them apt
For ministries so high: therefore their views
Were by enlight'ning grace and their own merit
Exalted; so that in their will confirm'd
They stand, nor feel to fall. For do not doubt,
But to receive the grace, which heav'n vouchsafes,
Is meritorious, even as the soul
With prompt affection welcometh the guest.
Now, without further help, if with good heed
My words thy mind have treasur'd, thou henceforth
This consistory round about mayst scan,
And gaze thy fill. But since thou hast on earth
Heard vain disputers, reasoners in the schools,
Canvas the' angelic nature, and dispute
Its powers of apprehension, memory, choice;
Therefore, 't is well thou take from me the truth,
Pure and without disguise, which they below,
Equivocating, darken and perplex.

"Know thou, that, from the first, these substances,
Rejoicing in the countenance of God,
Have held unceasingly their view, intent
Upon the glorious vision, from the which

Naught absent is nor hid: where then no change
Of newness with succession interrupts,
Remembrance there needs none to gather up
Divided thought and images remote

“So that men, thus at variance with the truth
Dream, though their eyes be open; reckless some
Of error; others well aware they err,
To whom more guilt and shame are justly due.
Each the known track of sage philosophy
Deserts, and has a byway of his own:
So much the restless eagerness to shine
And love of singularity prevail.
Yet this, offensive as it is, provokes
Heav’n’s anger less, than when the book of God
Is forc’d to yield to man’s authority,
Or from its straightness warp’d: no reck’ning made
What blood the sowing of it in the world
Has cost; what favour for himself he wins,
Who meekly clings to it. The aim of all
Is how to shine: e’en they, whose office is
To preach the Gospel, let the gospel sleep,
And pass their own inventions off instead.
One tells, how at Christ’s suffering the wan moon
Bent back her steps, and shadow’d o’er the sun
With intervenient disk, as she withdrew:
Another, how the light shrouded itself

Within its tabernacle, and left dark
The Spaniard and the Indian, with the Jew.
Such fables Florence in her pulpit hears,
Bandied about more frequent, than the names
Of Bindi and of Lapi in her streets.
The sheep, meanwhile, poor witless ones, return
From pasture, fed with wind: and what avails
For their excuse, they do not see their harm?
Christ said not to his first conventicle,
'Go forth and preach impostures to the world,'
But gave them truth to build on; and the sound
Was mighty on their lips; nor needed they,
Beside the gospel, other spear or shield,
To aid them in their warfare for the faith.
The preacher now provides himself with store
Of jests and gibes; and, so there be no lack
Of laughter, while he vents them, his big cowl
Distends, and he has won the meed he sought:
Could but the vulgar catch a glimpse the while
Of that dark bird which nestles in his hood,
They scarce would wait to hear the blessing said.
Which now the dotards hold in such esteem,
That every counterfeit, who spreads abroad
The hands of holy promise, finds a throng
Of credulous fools beneath. Saint Anthony
Fattens with this his swine, and others worse
Than swine, who diet at his lazy board,

Paying with unstamp'd metal for their fare.

“But (for we far have wander'd) let us seek
The forward path again; so as the way
Be shorten'd with the time. No mortal tongue
Nor thought of man hath ever reach'd so far,
That of these natures he might count the tribes.
What Daniel of their thousands hath reveal'd
With finite number infinite conceals.
The fountain at whose source these drink their beams,
With light supplies them in as many modes,
As there are splendours, that it shines on: each
According to the virtue it conceives,
Differing in love and sweet affection.
Look then how lofty and how huge in breadth
The' eternal might, which, broken and dispers'd
Over such countless mirrors, yet remains
Whole in itself and one, as at the first.”