

There is a place within the depths of hell  
Call'd Malebolge, all of rock dark-stain'd  
With hue ferruginous, e'en as the steep  
That round it circling winds. Right in the midst  
Of that abominable region, yawns  
A spacious gulf profound, whereof the frame  
Due time shall tell. The circle, that remains,  
Throughout its round, between the gulf and base  
Of the high craggy banks, successive forms  
Ten trenches, in its hollow bottom sunk.

As where to guard the walls, full many a foss  
Begirds some stately castle, sure defence  
Affording to the space within, so here  
Were model'd these; and as like fortresses  
E'en from their threshold to the brink without,  
Are flank'd with bridges; from the rock's low base  
Thus flinty paths advanc'd, that 'cross the moles  
And dikes, struck onward far as to the gulf,  
That in one bound collected cuts them off.  
Such was the place, wherein we found ourselves  
From Geryon's back dislodg'd. The bard to left  
Held on his way, and I behind him mov'd.

On our right hand new misery I saw,  
New pains, new executioners of wrath,  
That swarming peopled the first chasm. Below

Were naked sinners. Hitherward they came,  
Meeting our faces from the middle point,  
With us beyond but with a larger stride.  
E'en thus the Romans, when the year returns  
Of Jubilee, with better speed to rid  
The thronging multitudes, their means devise  
For such as pass the bridge; that on one side  
All front toward the castle, and approach  
Saint Peter's fane, on th' other towards the mount.

Each divers way along the grisly rock,  
Horn'd demons I beheld, with lashes huge,  
That on their back unmercifully smote.  
Ah! how they made them bound at the first stripe!

None for the second waited nor the third.

Meantime as on I pass'd, one met my sight  
Whom soon as view'd; "Of him," cried I, "not yet  
Mine eye hath had his fill." With fixed gaze  
I therefore scann'd him. Straight the teacher kind  
Paus'd with me, and consented I should walk  
Backward a space, and the tormented spirit,  
Who thought to hide him, bent his visage down.  
But it avail'd him nought; for I exclaim'd:  
"Thou who dost cast thy eye upon the ground,  
Unless thy features do belie thee much,

Venedico art thou. But what brings thee  
Into this bitter seas'ning?" He replied:  
"Unwillingly I answer to thy words.  
But thy clear speech, that to my mind recalls  
The world I once inhabited, constrains me.  
Know then 'twas I who led fair Ghisola  
To do the Marquis' will, however fame  
The shameful tale have bruited. Nor alone  
Bologna hither sendeth me to mourn  
Rather with us the place is so o'erthrong'd  
That not so many tongues this day are taught,  
Betwixt the Reno and Savena's stream,  
To answer SIPA in their country's phrase.  
And if of that securer proof thou need,  
Remember but our craving thirst for gold."

Him speaking thus, a demon with his thong  
Struck, and exclaim'd, "Away! corrupter! here  
Women are none for sale." Forthwith I join'd  
My escort, and few paces thence we came  
To where a rock forth issued from the bank.  
That easily ascended, to the right  
Upon its splinter turning, we depart  
From those eternal barriers. When arriv'd,  
Where underneath the gaping arch lets pass  
The scourged souls: "Pause here," the teacher said,  
"And let these others miserable, now

Strike on thy ken, faces not yet beheld,  
For that together they with us have walk'd."

From the old bridge we ey'd the pack, who came  
From th' other side towards us, like the rest,  
Excoriate from the lash. My gentle guide,  
By me unquestion'd, thus his speech resum'd:  
"Behold that lofty shade, who this way tends,  
And seems too woe-begone to drop a tear.  
How yet the regal aspect he retains!  
Jason is he, whose skill and prowess won  
The ram from Colchos. To the Lemnian isle  
His passage thither led him, when those bold  
And pitiless women had slain all their males.  
There he with tokens and fair witching words  
Hypsipyle beguil'd, a virgin young,  
Who first had all the rest herself beguil'd.  
Impregnated he left her there forlorn.  
Such is the guilt condemns him to this pain.  
Here too Medea's inj'ries are avenged.  
All bear him company, who like deceit  
To his have practis'd. And thus much to know  
Of the first vale suffice thee, and of those  
Whom its keen torments urge." Now had we come  
Where, crossing the next pier, the straighten'd path  
Bestrides its shoulders to another arch.

Hence in the second chasm we heard the ghosts,  
Who jibber in low melancholy sounds,  
With wide-stretch'd nostrils snort, and on themselves  
Smite with their palms. Upon the banks a scurf  
From the foul steam condens'd, encrusting hung,  
That held sharp combat with the sight and smell.

So hollow is the depth, that from no part,  
Save on the summit of the rocky span,  
Could I distinguish aught. Thus far we came;  
And thence I saw, within the foss below,  
A crowd immers'd in ordure, that appear'd  
Druff of the human body. There beneath  
Searching with eye inquisitive, I mark'd  
One with his head so grim'd, 'twere hard to deem,  
If he were clerk or layman. Loud he cried:  
"Why greedily thus bendest more on me,  
Than on these other filthy ones, thy ken?"

"Because if true my mem'ry," I replied,  
"I heretofore have seen thee with dry locks,  
And thou Alessio art of Lucca sprung.  
Therefore than all the rest I scan thee more."

Then beating on his brain these words he spake:  
"Me thus low down my flatteries have sunk,  
Wherewith I ne'er enough could glut my tongue."

My leader thus: "A little further stretch  
Thy face, that thou the visage well mayst note  
Of that besotted, sluttish courtezan,  
Who there doth rend her with defiled nails,  
Now crouching down, now risen on her feet.

"Thais is this, the harlot, whose false lip  
Answer'd her doting paramour that ask'd,  
'Thankest me much!'—'Say rather wondrously,'  
And seeing this here satiate be our view."