

O'er better waves to speed her rapid course  
The light bark of my genius lifts the sail,  
Well pleas'd to leave so cruel sea behind;  
And of that second region will I sing,  
In which the human spirit from sinful blot  
Is purg'd, and for ascent to Heaven prepares.

Here, O ye hallow'd Nine! for in your train  
I follow, here the deadened strain revive;  
Nor let Calliope refuse to sound  
A somewhat higher song, of that loud tone,  
Which when the wretched birds of chattering note  
Had heard, they of forgiveness lost all hope.

Sweet hue of eastern sapphire, that was spread  
O'er the serene aspect of the pure air,  
High up as the first circle, to mine eyes  
Unwonted joy renew'd, soon as I 'scap'd  
Forth from the atmosphere of deadly gloom,  
That had mine eyes and bosom fill'd with grief.  
The radiant planet, that to love invites,  
Made all the orient laugh, and veil'd beneath  
The Pisces' light, that in his escort came.

To the right hand I turn'd, and fix'd my mind  
On the' other pole attentive, where I saw  
Four stars ne'er seen before save by the ken

Of our first parents. Heaven of their rays  
Seem'd joyous. O thou northern site, bereft  
Indeed, and widow'd, since of these depriv'd!

As from this view I had desisted, straight  
Turning a little tow'rds the other pole,  
There from whence now the wain had disappear'd,  
I saw an old man standing by my side  
Alone, so worthy of rev'rence in his look,  
That ne'er from son to father more was ow'd.  
Low down his beard and mix'd with hoary white  
Descended, like his locks, which parting fell  
Upon his breast in double fold. The beams  
Of those four luminaries on his face  
So brightly shone, and with such radiance clear  
Deck'd it, that I beheld him as the sun.

"Say who are ye, that stemming the blind stream,  
Forth from th' eternal prison-house have fled?"  
He spoke and moved those venerable plumes.  
"Who hath conducted, or with lantern sure  
Lights you emerging from the depth of night,  
That makes the infernal valley ever black?  
Are the firm statutes of the dread abyss  
Broken, or in high heaven new laws ordain'd,  
That thus, condemn'd, ye to my caves approach?"

My guide, then laying hold on me, by words  
And intimations given with hand and head,  
Made my bent knees and eye submissive pay  
Due reverence; then thus to him replied.

“Not of myself I come; a Dame from heaven  
Descending, had besought me in my charge  
To bring. But since thy will implies, that more  
Our true condition I unfold at large,  
Mine is not to deny thee thy request.  
This mortal ne’er hath seen the farthest gloom.  
But erring by his folly had approach’d  
So near, that little space was left to turn.  
Then, as before I told, I was dispatch’d  
To work his rescue, and no way remain’d  
Save this which I have ta’en. I have display’d  
Before him all the regions of the bad;  
And purpose now those spirits to display,  
That under thy command are purg’d from sin.  
How I have brought him would be long to say.  
From high descends the virtue, by whose aid  
I to thy sight and hearing him have led.  
Now may our coming please thee. In the search  
Of liberty he journeys: that how dear  
They know, who for her sake have life refus’d.  
Thou knowest, to whom death for her was sweet  
In Utica, where thou didst leave those weeds,

That in the last great day will shine so bright.  
For us the' eternal edicts are unmov'd:  
He breathes, and I am free of Minos' power,  
Abiding in that circle where the eyes  
Of thy chaste Marcia beam, who still in look  
Prays thee, O hallow'd spirit! to own her shine.  
Then by her love we' implore thee, let us pass  
Through thy sev'n regions; for which best thanks  
I for thy favour will to her return,  
If mention there below thou not disdain."

"Marcia so pleasing in my sight was found,"  
He then to him rejoin'd, "while I was there,  
That all she ask'd me I was fain to grant.  
Now that beyond the' accursed stream she dwells,  
She may no longer move me, by that law,  
Which was ordain'd me, when I issued thence.  
Not so, if Dame from heaven, as thou sayst,  
Moves and directs thee; then no flattery needs.  
Enough for me that in her name thou ask.  
Go therefore now: and with a slender reed  
See that thou duly gird him, and his face  
Lave, till all sordid stain thou wipe from thence.  
For not with eye, by any cloud obscur'd,  
Would it be seemly before him to come,  
Who stands the foremost minister in heaven.  
This islet all around, there far beneath,

Where the wave beats it, on the oozy bed  
Produces store of reeds. No other plant,  
Cover'd with leaves, or harden'd in its stalk,  
There lives, not bending to the water's sway.  
After, this way return not; but the sun  
Will show you, that now rises, where to take  
The mountain in its easiest ascent."

He disappear'd; and I myself uprais'd  
Speechless, and to my guide retiring close,  
Toward him turn'd mine eyes. He thus began;  
"My son! observant thou my steps pursue.  
We must retreat to rearward, for that way  
The champain to its low extreme declines."

The dawn had chas'd the matin hour of prime,  
Which deaf before it, so that from afar  
I spy'd the trembling of the ocean stream.

We travers'd the deserted plain, as one  
Who, wander'd from his track, thinks every step  
Trodden in vain till he regain the path.

When we had come, where yet the tender dew  
Strove with the sun, and in a place, where fresh  
The wind breath'd o'er it, while it slowly dried;  
Both hands extended on the watery grass

My master plac'd, in graceful act and kind.  
Whence I of his intent before appriz'd,  
Stretch'd out to him my cheeks suffus'd with tears.  
There to my visage he anew restor'd  
That hue, which the dun shades of hell conceal'd.

Then on the solitary shore arriv'd,  
That never sailing on its waters saw  
Man, that could after measure back his course,  
He girt me in such manner as had pleas'd  
Him who instructed, and O, strange to tell!  
As he selected every humble plant,  
Wherever one was pluck'd, another there  
Resembling, straightway in its place arose.