

Now we had left the angel, who had turn'd  
To the sixth circle our ascending step,  
One gash from off my forehead raz'd: while they,  
Whose wishes tend to justice, shouted forth:  
"Blessed!" and ended with, "I thirst:" and I,  
More nimble than along the other straits,  
So journey'd, that, without the sense of toil,  
I follow'd upward the swift-footed shades;  
When Virgil thus began: "Let its pure flame  
From virtue flow, and love can never fail  
To warm another's bosom' so the light  
Shine manifestly forth. Hence from that hour,  
When 'mongst us in the purlieus of the deep,  
Came down the spirit of Aquinum's hard,  
Who told of thine affection, my good will  
Hath been for thee of quality as strong  
As ever link'd itself to one not seen.  
Therefore these stairs will now seem short to me.  
But tell me: and if too secure I loose  
The rein with a friend's license, as a friend  
Forgive me, and speak now as with a friend:  
How chanc'd it covetous desire could find  
Place in that bosom, 'midst such ample store  
Of wisdom, as thy zeal had treasur'd there?"

First somewhat mov'd to laughter by his words,  
Stattius replied: "Each syllable of thine

Is a dear pledge of love. Things oft appear  
That minister false matters to our doubts,  
When their true causes are remov'd from sight.  
Thy question doth assure me, thou believ'st  
I was on earth a covetous man, perhaps  
Because thou found'st me in that circle plac'd.  
Know then I was too wide of avarice:  
And e'en for that excess, thousands of moons  
Have wax'd and wan'd upon my sufferings.  
And were it not that I with heedful care  
Noted where thou exclaim'st as if in ire  
With human nature, 'Why, thou cursed thirst  
Of gold! dost not with juster measure guide  
The appetite of mortals?' I had met  
The fierce encounter of the voluble rock.  
Then was I ware that with too ample wing  
The hands may haste to lavishment, and turn'd,  
As from my other evil, so from this  
In penitence. How many from their grave  
Shall with shorn locks arise, who living, aye  
And at life's last extreme, of this offence,  
Through ignorance, did not repent. And know,  
The fault which lies direct from any sin  
In level opposition, here With that  
Wastes its green rankness on one common heap.  
Therefore if I have been with those, who wail  
Their avarice, to cleanse me, through reverse

Of their transgression, such hath been my lot.”

To whom the sovran of the pastoral song:

“While thou didst sing that cruel warfare wag’d

By the twin sorrow of Jocasta’s womb,

From thy discourse with Clio there, it seems

As faith had not been shine: without the which

Good deeds suffice not. And if so, what sun

Rose on thee, or what candle pierc’d the dark

That thou didst after see to hoist the sail,

And follow, where the fisherman had led?”

He answering thus: “By thee conducted first,

I enter’d the Parnassian grots, and quaff’d

Of the clear spring; illumin’d first by thee

Open’d mine eyes to God. Thou didst, as one,

Who, journeying through the darkness, hears a light

Behind, that profits not himself, but makes

His followers wise, when thou exclaimedst, ‘Lo!

A renovated world! Justice return’d!

Times of primeval innocence restor’d!

And a new race descended from above!’

Poet and Christian both to thee I owed.

That thou mayst mark more clearly what I trace,

My hand shall stretch forth to inform the lines

With livelier colouring. Soon o’er all the world,

By messengers from heav’n, the true belief

Teem'd now prolific, and that word of thine  
Accordant, to the new instructors chim'd.  
Induc'd by which agreement, I was wont  
Resort to them; and soon their sanctity  
So won upon me, that, Domitian's rage  
Pursuing them, I mix'd my tears with theirs,  
And, while on earth I stay'd, still succour'd them;  
And their most righteous customs made me scorn  
All sects besides. Before I led the Greeks  
In tuneful fiction, to the streams of Thebes,  
I was baptiz'd; but secretly, through fear,  
Remain'd a Christian, and conform'd long time  
To Pagan rites. Five centuries and more,  
T for that lukewarmness was fain to pace  
Round the fourth circle. Thou then, who hast rais'd  
The covering, which did hide such blessing from me,  
Whilst much of this ascent is yet to climb,  
Say, if thou know, where our old Terence bides,  
Caecilius, Plautus, Varro: if condemn'd  
They dwell, and in what province of the deep."  
"These," said my guide, "with Persius and myself,  
And others many more, are with that Greek,  
Of mortals, the most cherish'd by the Nine,  
In the first ward of darkness. There ofttimes  
We of that mount hold converse, on whose top  
For aye our nurses live. We have the bard  
Of Pella, and the Teian, Agatho,

Simonides, and many a Grecian else  
Ingarlanded with laurel. Of thy train  
Antigone is there, Deiphile,  
Argia, and as sorrowful as erst  
Ismene, and who show'd Langia's wave:  
Deidamia with her sisters there,  
And blind Tiresias' daughter, and the bride  
Sea-born of Peleus." Either poet now  
Was silent, and no longer by th' ascent  
Or the steep walls obstructed, round them cast  
Inquiring eyes. Four handmaids of the day  
Had finish'd now their office, and the fifth  
Was at the chariot-beam, directing still  
Its balmy point aloof, when thus my guide:  
"Methinks, it well behooves us to the brink  
Bend the right shoulder' circuiting the mount,  
As we have ever us'd." So custom there  
Was usher to the road, the which we chose  
Less doubtful, as that worthy shade complied.

They on before me went; I sole pursued,  
List'ning their speech, that to my thoughts convey'd  
Mysterious lessons of sweet poesy.  
But soon they ceas'd; for midway of the road  
A tree we found, with goodly fruitage hung,  
And pleasant to the smell: and as a fir  
Upward from bough to bough less ample spreads,

So downward this less ample spread, that none.  
Methinks, aloft may climb. Upon the side,  
That clos'd our path, a liquid crystal fell  
From the steep rock, and through the sprays above  
Stream'd showering. With associate step the bards  
Drew near the plant; and from amidst the leaves  
A voice was heard: "Ye shall be chary of me;"  
And after added: "Mary took more thought  
For joy and honour of the nuptial feast,  
Than for herself who answers now for you.  
The women of old Rome were satisfied  
With water for their beverage. Daniel fed  
On pulse, and wisdom gain'd. The primal age  
Was beautiful as gold; and hunger then  
Made acorns tasteful, thirst each rivulet  
Run nectar. Honey and locusts were the food,  
Whereon the Baptist in the wilderness  
Fed, and that eminence of glory reach'd  
And greatness, which the' Evangelist records."