

Ill strives the will, 'gainst will more wise that strives
His pleasure therefore to mine own preferr'd,
I drew the sponge yet thirsty from the wave.

Onward I mov'd: he also onward mov'd,
Who led me, coasting still, wherever place
Along the rock was vacant, as a man
Walks near the battlements on narrow wall.
For those on th' other part, who drop by drop
Wring out their all-infecting malady,
Too closely press the verge. Accurst be thou!
Inveterate wolf! whose gorge ingluts more prey,
Than every beast beside, yet is not fill'd!
So bottomless thy maw!—Ye spheres of heaven!
To whom there are, as seems, who attribute
All change in mortal state, when is the day
Of his appearing, for whom fate reserves
To chase her hence? —With wary steps and slow
We pass'd; and I attentive to the shades,
Whom piteously I heard lament and wail;

And, 'midst the wailing, one before us heard
Cry out "O blessed Virgin!" as a dame
In the sharp pangs of childbed; and "How poor
Thou wast," it added, "witness that low roof
Where thou didst lay thy sacred burden down.
O good Fabricius! thou didst virtue choose

With poverty, before great wealth with vice.”

The words so pleas’d me, that desire to know
The spirit, from whose lip they seem’d to come,
Did draw me onward. Yet it spake the gift
Of Nicholas, which on the maidens he
Bounteous bestow’d, to save their youthful prime
Unblemish’d. “Spirit! who dost speak of deeds
So worthy, tell me who thou was,” I said,
“And why thou dost with single voice renew
Memorial of such praise. That boon vouchsaf’d
Haply shall meet reward; if I return
To finish the Short pilgrimage of life,
Still speeding to its close on restless wing.”

“I,” answer’d he, “will tell thee, not for hell,
Which thence I look for; but that in thyself
Grace so exceeding shines, before thy time
Of mortal dissolution. I was root
Of that ill plant, whose shade such poison sheds
O’er all the Christian land, that seldom thence
Good fruit is gather’d. Vengeance soon should come,
Had Ghent and Douay, Lille and Bruges power;
And vengeance I of heav’n’s great Judge implore.
Hugh Capet was I high: from me descend
The Philips and the Louis, of whom France
Newly is govern’d; born of one, who ply’d

The slaughterer's trade at Paris. When the race
Of ancient kings had vanish'd (all save one
Wrapt up in sable weeds) within my gripe
I found the reins of empire, and such powers
Of new acquirement, with full store of friends,
That soon the widow'd circlet of the crown
Was girt upon the temples of my son,
He, from whose bones th' anointed race begins.
Till the great dower of Provence had remov'd
The stains, that yet obscur'd our lowly blood,
Its sway indeed was narrow, but howe'er
It wrought no evil: there, with force and lies,
Began its rapine; after, for amends,
Poitou it seiz'd, Navarre and Gascony.
To Italy came Charles, and for amends
Young Conradine an innocent victim slew,
And sent th' angelic teacher back to heav'n,
Still for amends. I see the time at hand,
That forth from France invites another Charles
To make himself and kindred better known.
Unarm'd he issues, saving with that lance,
Which the arch-traitor tilted with; and that
He carries with so home a thrust, as rives
The bowels of poor Florence. No increase
Of territory hence, but sin and shame
Shall be his guerdon, and so much the more
As he more lightly deems of such foul wrong.

I see the other, who a prisoner late
Had steps on shore, exposing to the mart
His daughter, whom he bargains for, as do
The Corsairs for their slaves. O avarice!
What canst thou more, who hast subdued our blood
So wholly to thyself, they feel no care
Of their own flesh? To hide with direr guilt
Past ill and future, lo! the flower-de-luce
Enters Alagna! in his Vicar Christ
Himself a captive, and his mockery
Acted again! Lo! lo his holy lip
The vinegar and gall once more applied!
And he 'twixt living robbers doom'd to bleed!
Lo! the new Pilate, of whose cruelty
Such violence cannot fill the measure up,
With no degree to sanction, pushes on
Into the temple his yet eager sails!

“O sovran Master! when shall I rejoice
To see the vengeance, which thy wrath well-pleas'd
In secret silence broods?—While daylight lasts,
So long what thou didst hear of her, sole spouse
Of the Great Spirit, and on which thou turn'dst
To me for comment, is the general theme
Of all our prayers: but when it darkens, then
A different strain we utter, then record
Pygmalion, whom his gluttonous thirst of gold

Made traitor, robber, parricide: the woes
Of Midas, which his greedy wish ensued,
Mark'd for derision to all future times:
And the fond Achan, how he stole the prey,
That yet he seems by Joshua's ire pursued.
Sapphira with her husband next, we blame;
And praise the forefeet, that with furious ramp
Spurn'd Heliodorus. All the mountain round
Rings with the infamy of Thracia's king,
Who slew his Phrygian charge: and last a shout
Ascends: "Declare, O Crassus! for thou know'st,
The flavour of thy gold." The voice of each
Now high now low, as each his impulse prompts,
Is led through many a pitch, acute or grave.
Therefore, not singly, I erewhile rehears'd
That blessedness we tell of in the day:
But near me none beside his accent rais'd."

From him we now had parted, and essay'd
With utmost efforts to surmount the way,
When I did feel, as nodding to its fall,
The mountain tremble; whence an icy chill
Seiz'd on me, as on one to death convey'd.
So shook not Delos, when Latona there
Couch'd to bring forth the twin-born eyes of heaven.

Forthwith from every side a shout arose

So vehement, that suddenly my guide
Drew near, and cried: "Doubt not, while I conduct thee."
"Glory!" all shouted (such the sounds mine ear
Gather'd from those, who near me swell'd the sounds)
"Glory in the highest be to God." We stood
Immovably suspended, like to those,
The shepherds, who first heard in Bethlehem's field
That song: till ceas'd the trembling, and the song
Was ended: then our hallow'd path resum'd,
Eying the prostrate shadows, who renew'd
Their custom'd mourning. Never in my breast
Did ignorance so struggle with desire
Of knowledge, if my memory do not err,
As in that moment; nor through haste dar'd I
To question, nor myself could aught discern,
So on I far'd in thoughtfulness and dread.