

If e'er the sacred poem that hath made  
Both heav'n and earth copartners in its toil,  
And with lean abstinence, through many a year,  
Faded my brow, be destin'd to prevail  
Over the cruelty, which bars me forth  
Of the fair sheep-fold, where a sleeping lamb  
The wolves set on and fain had worried me,  
With other voice and fleece of other grain  
I shall forthwith return, and, standing up  
At my baptismal font, shall claim the wreath  
Due to the poet's temples: for I there  
First enter'd on the faith which maketh souls  
Acceptable to God: and, for its sake,  
Peter had then circled my forehead thus.

Next from the squadron, whence had issued forth  
The first fruit of Christ's vicars on the earth,  
Toward us mov'd a light, at view whereof  
My Lady, full of gladness, spake to me:  
"Lo! lo! behold the peer of mickle might,  
That makes Falicia throng'd with visitants!"

As when the ring-dove by his mate alights,  
In circles each about the other wheels,  
And murmuring cooes his fondness; thus saw I  
One, of the other great and glorious prince,  
With kindly greeting hail'd, extolling both

Their heavenly banqueting; but when an end  
Was to their gratulation, silent, each,  
Before me sat they down, so burning bright,  
I could not look upon them. Smiling then,  
Beatrice spake: "O life in glory shrin'd!"  
Who didst the largess of our kingly court  
Set down with faithful pen! let now thy voice  
Of hope the praises in this height resound.  
For thou, who figur'st them in shapes, as clear,  
As Jesus stood before thee, well can'st speak them."

"Lift up thy head, and be thou strong in trust:  
For that, which hither from the mortal world  
Arriveth, must be ripen'd in our beam."

Such cheering accents from the second flame  
Assur'd me; and mine eyes I lifted up  
Unto the mountains that had bow'd them late  
With over-heavy burden. "Sith our Liege  
Wills of his grace that thou, or ere thy death,  
In the most secret council, with his lords  
Shouldst be confronted, so that having view'd  
The glories of our court, thou mayst therewith  
Thyself, and all who hear, invigorate  
With hope, that leads to blissful end; declare,  
What is that hope, how it doth flourish in thee,  
And whence thou hadst it?" Thus proceeding still,

The second light: and she, whose gentle love  
My soaring pennons in that lofty flight  
Escorted, thus preventing me, rejoin'd:  
Among her sons, not one more full of hope,  
Hath the church militant: so 't is of him  
Recorded in the sun, whose liberal orb  
Enlighteneth all our tribe: and ere his term  
Of warfare, hence permitted he is come,  
From Egypt to Jerusalem, to see.

The other points, both which thou hast inquir'd,  
Not for more knowledge, but that he may tell  
How dear thou holdst the virtue, these to him  
Leave I; for he may answer thee with ease,  
And without boasting, so God give him grace."

Like to the scholar, practis'd in his task,  
Who, willing to give proof of diligence,  
Seconds his teacher gladly, "Hope," said I,  
"Is of the joy to come a sure expectance,  
Th' effect of grace divine and merit preceding.

This light from many a star visits my heart,  
But flow'd to me the first from him, who sang  
The songs of the Supreme, himself supreme  
Among his tuneful brethren. 'Let all hope  
In thee,' so speak his anthem, 'who have known  
Thy name;' and with my faith who know not that?  
From thee, the next, distilling from his spring,  
In thine epistle, fell on me the drops

So plenteously, that I on others shower  
The influence of their dew." Whileas I spake,  
A lamping, as of quick and vollied lightning,  
Within the bosom of that mighty sheen,  
Play'd tremulous; then forth these accents breath'd:  
"Love for the virtue which attended me  
E'en to the palm, and issuing from the field,  
Glows vigorous yet within me, and inspires  
To ask of thee, whom also it delights;  
What promise thou from hope in chief dost win."

"Both scriptures, new and ancient," I reply'd;  
"Propose the mark (which even now I view)  
For souls belov'd of God. Isaias saith,

'That, in their own land, each one must be clad  
In twofold vesture; and their proper lands this delicious life.'  
In terms more full,  
And clearer far, thy brother hath set forth  
This revelation to us, where he tells  
Of the white raiment destin'd to the saints."  
And, as the words were ending, from above,  
"They hope in thee," first heard we cried: whereto  
Answer'd the carols all. Amidst them next,  
A light of so clear amplitude emerg'd,  
That winter's month were but a single day,  
Were such a crystal in the Cancer's sign.

Like as a virgin riseth up, and goes,  
And enters on the mazes of the dance,  
Though gay, yet innocent of worse intent,  
Than to do fitting honour to the bride;  
So I beheld the new effulgence come  
Unto the other two, who in a ring  
Wheel'd, as became their rapture. In the dance  
And in the song it mingled. And the dame  
Held on them fix'd her looks: e'en as the spouse  
Silent and moveless. "This is he, who lay  
Upon the bosom of our pelican:  
This he, into whose keeping from the cross  
The mighty charge was given." Thus she spake,  
Yet therefore naught the more remov'd her Sight  
From marking them, or ere her words began,  
Or when they clos'd. As he, who looks intent,  
And strives with searching ken, how he may see  
The sun in his eclipse, and, through desire  
Of seeing, loseth power of sight: so I  
Peer'd on that last resplendence, while I heard:  
"Why dazzlest thou thine eyes in seeking that,  
Which here abides not? Earth my body is,  
In earth: and shall be, with the rest, so long,  
As till our number equal the decree  
Of the Most High. The two that have ascended,  
In this our blessed cloister, shine alone

With the two garments. So report below.”

As when, for ease of labour, or to shun  
Suspected peril at a whistle’s breath,  
The oars, erewhile dash’d frequent in the wave,  
All rest; the flamy circle at that voice  
So rested, and the mingling sound was still,  
Which from the trinal band soft-breathing rose.  
I turn’d, but ah! how trembled in my thought,  
When, looking at my side again to see  
Beatrice, I descried her not, although  
Not distant, on the happy coast she stood.