

The world was in its day of peril dark
Wont to believe the dotage of fond love
From the fair Cyprian deity, who rolls
In her third epicycle, shed on men
By stream of potent radiance: therefore they
Of elder time, in their old error blind,
Not her alone with sacrifice ador'd
And invocation, but like honours paid
To Cupid and Dione, deem'd of them
Her mother, and her son, him whom they feign'd
To sit in Dido's bosom: and from her,
Whom I have sung preluding, borrow'd they
The appellation of that star, which views,
Now obvious and now averse, the sun.

I was not ware that I was wafted up
Into its orb; but the new loveliness
That grac'd my lady, gave me ample proof
That we had entered there. And as in flame
A sparkle is distinct, or voice in voice
Discern'd, when one its even tenour keeps,
The other comes and goes; so in that light
I other luminaries saw, that cours'd
In circling motion rapid more or less,
As their eternal phases each impels.

Never was blast from vapour charged with cold,

Whether invisible to eye or no,
Descended with such speed, it had not seem'd
To linger in dull tardiness, compar'd
To those celestial lights, that tow'rds us came,
Leaving the circuit of their joyous ring,
Conducted by the lofty seraphim.
And after them, who in the van appear'd,
Such an hosanna sounded, as hath left
Desire, ne'er since extinct in me, to hear
Renew'd the strain. Then parting from the rest
One near us drew, and sole began: "We all
Are ready at thy pleasure, well dispos'd
To do thee gentle service. We are they,
To whom thou in the world erewhile didst Sing
'O ye! whose intellectual ministry
Moves the third heaven!' and in one orb we roll,
One motion, one impulse, with those who rule
Princedom in heaven; yet are of love so full,
That to please thee 't will be as sweet to rest."

After mine eyes had with meek reverence
Sought the celestial guide, and were by her
Assur'd, they turn'd again unto the light
Who had so largely promis'd, and with voice
That bare the lively pressure of my zeal,
"Tell who ye are," I cried. Forthwith it grew
In size and splendour, through augmented joy;

And thus it answer'd: "A short date below
The world possess'd me. Had the time been more,
Much evil, that will come, had never chanc'd.
My gladness hides thee from me, which doth shine
Around, and shroud me, as an animal
In its own silk unswath'd. Thou lov'dst me well,
And had'st good cause; for had my sojourning
Been longer on the earth, the love I bare thee
Had put forth more than blossoms. The left bank,
That Rhone, when he hath mix'd with Sorga, laves."

"In me its lord expected, and that horn
Of fair Ausonia, with its boroughs old,
Bari, and Croton, and Gaeta pil'd,
From where the Trento disembogues his waves,
With Verde mingled, to the salt sea-flood.
Already on my temples beam'd the crown,
Which gave me sov'reignty over the land
By Danube wash'd, whenas he strays beyond
The limits of his German shores. The realm,
Where, on the gulf by stormy Eurus lash'd,
Betwixt Pelorus and Pachynian heights,
The beautiful Trinacria lies in gloom
(Not through Typhaeus, but the vap'ry cloud
Bituminous upsteam'd), THAT too did look
To have its scepter wielded by a race
Of monarchs, sprung through me from Charles and Rodolph;

had not ill lording which doth spirit up
The people ever, in Palermo rais'd
The shout of 'death,' re-echo'd loud and long.
Had but my brother's foresight kenn'd as much,
He had been warier that the greedy want
Of Catalonia might not work his bale.
And truly need there is, that he forecast,
Or other for him, lest more freight be laid
On his already over-laden bark.
Nature in him, from bounty fall'n to thrift,
Would ask the guard of braver arms, than such
As only care to have their coffers fill'd."

"My liege, it doth enhance the joy thy words
Infuse into me, mighty as it is,
To think my gladness manifest to thee,
As to myself, who own it, when thou lookst
Into the source and limit of all good,
There, where thou markest that which thou dost speak,
Thence priz'd of me the more. Glad thou hast made me.
Now make intelligent, clearing the doubt
Thy speech hath raised in me; for much I muse,
How bitter can spring up, when sweet is sown."

I thus inquiring; he forthwith replied:
"If I have power to show one truth, soon that
Shall face thee, which thy questioning declares

Behind thee now conceal'd. The Good, that guides
And blessed makes this realm, which thou dost mount,
Ordains its providence to be the virtue
In these great bodies: nor th' all perfect Mind
Upholds their nature merely, but in them
Their energy to save: for nought, that lies
Within the range of that unerring bow,
But is as level with the destin'd aim,
As ever mark to arrow's point oppos'd.
Were it not thus, these heavens, thou dost visit,
Would their effect so work, it would not be
Art, but destruction; and this may not chance,
If th' intellectual powers, that move these stars,
Fail not, or who, first faulty made them fail.
Wilt thou this truth more clearly evidenc'd?"

To whom I thus: "It is enough: no fear,
I see, lest nature in her part should tire."

He straight rejoin'd: "Say, were it worse for man,
If he liv'd not in fellowship on earth?"

"Yea," answer'd I; "nor here a reason needs."

"And may that be, if different estates
Grow not of different duties in your life?
Consult your teacher, and he tells you 'no'."

Thus did he come, deducing to this point,
And then concluded: "For this cause behooves,
The roots, from whence your operations come,
Must differ. Therefore one is Solon born;
Another, Xerxes; and Melchisidec
A third; and he a fourth, whose airy voyage
Cost him his son. In her circuitous course,
Nature, that is the seal to mortal wax,
Doth well her art, but no distinctions owns
'Twixt one or other household. Hence befalls
That Esau is so wide of Jacob: hence
Quirinus of so base a father springs,
He dates from Mars his lineage. Were it not
That providence celestial overrul'd,
Nature, in generation, must the path
Trac'd by the generator, still pursue
Unswervingly. Thus place I in thy sight
That, which was late behind thee. But, in sign
Of more affection for thee, 't is my will
Thou wear this corollary. Nature ever
Finding discordant fortune, like all seed
Out of its proper climate, thrives but ill.
And were the world below content to mark
And work on the foundation nature lays,
It would not lack supply of excellence.
But ye perversely to religion strain

Him, who was born to gird on him the sword,
And of the fluent phrasemen make your king;
Therefore your steps have wander'd from the paths."