

Noon's fervid hour perchance six thousand miles  
From hence is distant; and the shadowy cone  
Almost to level on our earth declines;  
When from the midmost of this blue abyss  
By turns some star is to our vision lost.  
And straightway as the handmaid of the sun  
Puts forth her radiant brow, all, light by light,  
Fade, and the spangled firmament shuts in,  
E'en to the loveliest of the glittering throng.  
Thus vanish'd gradually from my sight  
The triumph, which plays ever round the point,  
That overcame me, seeming (for it did)  
Engirt by that it girdeth. Wherefore love,  
With loss of other object, forc'd me bend  
Mine eyes on Beatrice once again.

If all, that hitherto is told of her,  
Were in one praise concluded, 't were too weak  
To furnish out this turn. Mine eyes did look  
On beauty, such, as I believe in sooth,  
Not merely to exceed our human, but,  
That save its Maker, none can to the full  
Enjoy it. At this point o'erpower'd I fail,  
Unequal to my theme, as never bard  
Of buskin or of sock hath fail'd before.  
For, as the sun doth to the feeblest sight,  
E'en so remembrance of that witching smile

Hath dispossess my spirit of itself.  
Not from that day, when on this earth I first  
Beheld her charms, up to that view of them,  
Have I with song applausive ever ceas'd  
To follow, but not follow them no more;  
My course here bounded, as each artist's is,  
When it doth touch the limit of his skill.

She (such as I bequeath her to the bruit  
Of louder trump than mine, which hasteneth on,  
Urging its arduous matter to the close),  
Her words resum'd, in gesture and in voice  
Resembling one accustom'd to command:  
"Forth from the last corporeal are we come  
Into the heav'n, that is unbodied light,  
Light intellectual replete with love,  
Love of true happiness replete with joy,  
Joy, that transcends all sweetness of delight.  
Here shalt thou look on either mighty host  
Of Paradise; and one in that array,  
Which in the final judgment thou shalt see."

As when the lightning, in a sudden spleen  
Unfolded, dashes from the blinding eyes  
The visive spirits dazzled and bedimm'd;  
So, round about me, fulminating streams  
Of living radiance play'd, and left me swath'd

And veil'd in dense impenetrable blaze.  
Such weal is in the love, that stills this heav'n;  
For its own flame the torch this fitting ever!

No sooner to my list'ning ear had come  
The brief assurance, than I understood  
New virtue into me infus'd, and sight  
Kindled afresh, with vigour to sustain  
Excess of light, however pure. I look'd;  
And in the likeness of a river saw  
Light flowing, from whose amber-seeming waves  
Flash'd up effulgence, as they glided on  
'Twixt banks, on either side, painted with spring,  
Incredible how fair; and, from the tide,  
There ever and anon, outstarting, flew  
Sparkles instinct with life; and in the flow'rs  
Did set them, like to rubies chas'd in gold;  
Then, as if drunk with odors, plung'd again  
Into the wondrous flood; from which, as one  
Re'enter'd, still another rose. "The thirst  
Of knowledge high, whereby thou art inflam'd,  
To search the meaning of what here thou seest,  
The more it warms thee, pleases me the more.  
But first behooves thee of this water drink,  
Or ere that longing be allay'd." So spake  
The day-star of mine eyes; then thus subjoin'd:  
"This stream, and these, forth issuing from its gulf,

And diving back, a living topaz each,  
With all this laughter on its bloomy shores,  
Are but a preface, shadowy of the truth  
They emblem: not that, in themselves, the things  
Are crude; but on thy part is the defect,  
For that thy views not yet aspire so high.”  
Never did babe, that had outslept his wont,  
Rush, with such eager straining, to the milk,  
As I toward the water, bending me,  
To make the better mirrors of mine eyes  
In the refining wave; and, as the eaves  
Of mine eyelids did drink of it, forthwith  
Seem’d it unto me turn’d from length to round,  
Then as a troop of maskers, when they put  
Their vizors off, look other than before,  
The counterfeited semblance thrown aside;  
So into greater jubilee were chang’d  
Those flowers and sparkles, and distinct I saw  
Before me either court of heav’n displac’d.

O prime enlightener! thou who crav’st me strength  
On the high triumph of thy realm to gaze!  
Grant virtue now to utter what I kenn’d,  
There is in heav’n a light, whose goodly shine  
Makes the Creator visible to all  
Created, that in seeing him alone  
Have peace; and in a circle spreads so far,

That the circumference were too loose a zone  
To girdle in the sun. All is one beam,  
Reflected from the summit of the first,  
That moves, which being hence and vigour takes,  
And as some cliff, that from the bottom eyes  
Its image mirror'd in the crystal flood,  
As if t' admire its brave appareling  
Of verdure and of flowers: so, round about,  
Eyeing the light, on more than million thrones,  
Stood, eminent, whatever from our earth  
Has to the skies return'd. How wide the leaves  
Extended to their utmost of this rose,  
Whose lowest step embosoms such a space  
Of ample radiance! Yet, nor amplitude  
Nor height impeded, but my view with ease  
Took in the full dimensions of that joy.  
Near or remote, what there avails, where God  
Immediate rules, and Nature, awed, suspends  
Her sway? Into the yellow of the rose  
Perennial, which in bright expansiveness,  
Lays forth its gradual blooming, redolent  
Of praises to the never-wint'ring sun,  
As one, who fain would speak yet holds his peace,  
Beatrice led me; and, "Behold," she said,  
"This fair assemblage! stoles of snowy white  
How numberless! The city, where we dwell,  
Behold how vast! and these our seats so throng'd

Few now are wanting here! In that proud stall,  
On which, the crown, already o'er its state  
Suspended, holds thine eyes—or ere thyself  
Mayst at the wedding sup,—shall rest the soul  
Of the great Harry, he who, by the world  
Augustas hail'd, to Italy must come,  
Before her day be ripe. But ye are sick,  
And in your tetchy wantonness as blind,  
As is the bantling, that of hunger dies,  
And drives away the nurse. Nor may it be,  
That he, who in the sacred forum sways,  
Openly or in secret, shall with him  
Accordant walk: Whom God will not endure  
I' th' holy office long; but thrust him down  
To Simon Magus, where Magna's priest  
Will sink beneath him: such will be his meed."