

Astounded, to the guardian of my steps  
I turn'd me, like the chill, who always runs  
Thither for succour, where he trusteth most,  
And she was like the mother, who her son  
Beholding pale and breathless, with her voice  
Soothes him, and he is cheer'd; for thus she spake,  
Soothing me: "Know'st not thou, thou art in heav'n?  
And know'st not thou, whatever is in heav'n,  
Is holy, and that nothing there is done  
But is done zealously and well? Deem now,  
What change in thee the song, and what my smile  
had wrought, since thus the shout had pow'r to move thee.  
In which couldst thou have understood their prayers,  
The vengeance were already known to thee,  
Which thou must witness ere thy mortal hour,  
The sword of heav'n is not in haste to smite,  
Nor yet doth linger, save unto his seeming,  
Who in desire or fear doth look for it.  
But elsewhere now I bid thee turn thy view;  
So shalt thou many a famous spirit behold."  
Mine eyes directing, as she will'd, I saw  
A hundred little spheres, that fairer grew  
By interchange of splendour. I remain'd,  
As one, who fearful of o'er-much presuming,  
Abates in him the keenness of desire,  
Nor dares to question, when amid those pearls,  
One largest and most lustrous onward drew,

That it might yield contentment to my wish;  
And from within it these the sounds I heard.

“If thou, like me, beheldst the charity  
That burns amongst us, what thy mind conceives,  
Were utter’d. But that, ere the lofty bound  
Thou reach, expectance may not weary thee,  
I will make answer even to the thought,  
Which thou hast such respect of. In old days,  
That mountain, at whose side Cassino rests,  
Was on its height frequented by a race  
Deceived and ill dispos’d: and I it was,  
Who thither carried first the name of Him,  
Who brought the soul-subliming truth to man.  
And such a speeding grace shone over me,  
That from their impious worship I reclaim’d  
The dwellers round about, who with the world  
Were in delusion lost. These other flames,  
The spirits of men contemplative, were all  
Enliven’d by that warmth, whose kindly force  
Gives birth to flowers and fruits of holiness.  
Here is Macarius; Romoaldo here:  
And here my brethren, who their steps refrain’d  
Within the cloisters, and held firm their heart.”

I answ’ring, thus; “Thy gentle words and kind,  
And this the cheerful semblance, I behold

Not unobservant, beaming in ye all,  
Have rais'd assurance in me, wakening it  
Full-blossom'd in my bosom, as a rose  
Before the sun, when the consummate flower  
Has spread to utmost amplitude. Of thee  
Therefore entreat I, father! to declare  
If I may gain such favour, as to gaze  
Upon thine image, by no covering veil'd."

"Brother!" he thus rejoin'd, "in the last sphere  
Expect completion of thy lofty aim,  
For there on each desire completion waits,  
And there on mine: where every aim is found  
Perfect, entire, and for fulfillment ripe.  
There all things are as they have ever been:  
For space is none to bound, nor pole divides,  
Our ladder reaches even to that clime,  
And so at giddy distance mocks thy view.  
Thither the Patriarch Jacob saw it stretch  
Its topmost round, when it appear'd to him  
With angels laden. But to mount it now  
None lifts his foot from earth: and hence my rule  
Is left a profitless stain upon the leaves;  
The walls, for abbey rear'd, turned into dens,  
The crows to sacks choak'd up with musty meal.  
Foul usury doth not more lift itself  
Against God's pleasure, than that fruit which makes

The hearts of monks so wanton: for whate'er  
Is in the church's keeping, all pertains.  
To such, as sue for heav'n's sweet sake, and not  
To those who in respect of kindred claim,  
Or on more vile allowance. Mortal flesh  
Is grown so dainty, good beginnings last not  
From the oak's birth, unto the acorn's setting.  
His convent Peter founded without gold  
Or silver; I with pray'rs and fasting mine;  
And Francis his in meek humility.  
And if thou note the point, whence each proceeds,  
Then look what it hath err'd to, thou shalt find  
The white grown murky. Jordan was turn'd back;  
And a less wonder, then the refluent sea,  
May at God's pleasure work amendment here."

So saying, to his assembly back he drew:  
And they together cluster'd into one,  
Then all roll'd upward like an eddying wind.

The sweet dame beckon'd me to follow them:  
And, by that influence only, so prevail'd  
Over my nature, that no natural motion,  
Ascending or descending here below,  
Had, as I mounted, with my pennon vied.

So, reader, as my hope is to return

Unto the holy triumph, for the which  
I oft times wail my sins, and smite my breast,  
Thou hadst been longer drawing out and thrusting  
Thy finger in the fire, than I was, ere  
The sign, that followeth Taurus, I beheld,  
And enter'd its precinct. O glorious stars!  
O light impregnate with exceeding virtue!  
To whom whate'er of genius lifteth me  
Above the vulgar, grateful I refer;  
With ye the parent of all mortal life  
Arose and set, when I did first inhale  
The Tuscan air; and afterward, when grace  
Vouchsaf'd me entrance to the lofty wheel  
That in its orb impels ye, fate decreed  
My passage at your clime. To you my soul  
Devoutly sighs, for virtue even now  
To meet the hard emprise that draws me on.

"Thou art so near the sum of blessedness,"  
Said Beatrice, "that behooves thy ken  
Be vigilant and clear. And, to this end,  
Or even thou advance thee further, hence  
Look downward, and contemplate, what a world  
Already stretched under our feet there lies:  
So as thy heart may, in its blithest mood,  
Present itself to the triumphal throng,  
Which through the' etherial concave comes rejoicing."

I straight obey'd; and with mine eye return'd  
Through all the seven spheres, and saw this globe  
So pitiful of semblance, that perforce  
It moved my smiles: and him in truth I hold  
For wisest, who esteems it least: whose thoughts  
Elsewhere are fix'd, him worthiest call and best.  
I saw the daughter of Latona shine  
Without the shadow, whereof late I deem'd  
That dense and rare were cause. Here I sustain'd  
The visage, Hyperion! of thy sun;  
And mark'd, how near him with their circle, round  
Move Maia and Dione; here discern'd  
Jove's tempering 'twixt his sire and son; and hence  
Their changes and their various aspects  
Distinctly scann'd. Nor might I not descry  
Of all the seven, how bulky each, how swift;  
Nor of their several distances not learn.  
This petty area (o'er the which we stride  
So fiercely), as along the eternal twins  
I wound my way, appear'd before me all,  
Forth from the havens stretch'd unto the hills.  
Then to the beauteous eyes mine eyes return'd.