

Through that celestial forest, whose thick shade
With lively greenness the new-springing day
Attemper'd, eager now to roam, and search
Its limits round, forthwith I left the bank,
Along the champain leisurely my way
Pursuing, o'er the ground, that on all sides
Delicious odour breath'd. A pleasant air,
That intermitted never, never veer'd,
Smote on my temples, gently, as a wind
Of softest influence: at which the sprays,
Obedient all, lean'd trembling to that part
Where first the holy mountain casts his shade,
Yet were not so disorder'd, but that still
Upon their top the feather'd quiristers
Applied their wonted art, and with full joy
Welcom'd those hours of prime, and warbled shrill
Amid the leaves, that to their jocund lays
inept tenor; even as from branch to branch,
Along the piney forests on the shore
Of Chiassi, rolls the gath'ring melody,
When Eolus hath from his cavern loos'd
The dripping south. Already had my steps,
Though slow, so far into that ancient wood
Transported me, I could not ken the place
Where I had enter'd, when behold! my path
Was bounded by a rill, which to the left
With little rippling waters bent the grass,

That issued from its brink. On earth no wave
How clean soe'er, that would not seem to have
Some mixture in itself, compar'd with this,
Transpicious, clear; yet darkly on it roll'd,
Darkly beneath perpetual gloom, which ne'er
Admits or sun or moon light there to shine.

My feet advanc'd not; but my wond'ring eyes
Pass'd onward, o'er the streamlet, to survey
The tender May-bloom, flush'd through many a hue,
In prodigal variety: and there,
As object, rising suddenly to view,
That from our bosom every thought beside
With the rare marvel chases, I beheld
A lady all alone, who, singing, went,
And culling flower from flower, wherewith her way
Was all o'er painted. "Lady beautiful!
Thou, who (if looks, that use to speak the heart,
Are worthy of our trust), with love's own beam
Dost warm thee," thus to her my speech I fram'd:
"Ah! please thee hither towards the streamlet bend
Thy steps so near, that I may list thy song.
Beholding thee and this fair place, methinks,
I call to mind where wander'd and how look'd
Proserpine, in that season, when her child
The mother lost, and she the bloomy spring."

As when a lady, turning in the dance,
Doth foot it featly, and advances scarce
One step before the other to the ground;
Over the yellow and vermilion flowers
Thus turn'd she at my suit, most maiden-like,
Valing her sober eyes, and came so near,
That I distinctly caught the dulcet sound.
Arriving where the limpid waters now
Lav'd the green sward, her eyes she deign'd to raise,
That shot such splendour on me, as I ween
Ne'er glanced from Cytherea's, when her son
Had sped his keenest weapon to her heart.
Upon the opposite bank she stood and smil'd
through her graceful fingers shifted still
The intermingling dyes, which without seed
That lofty land unbosoms. By the stream
Three paces only were we sunder'd: yet
The Hellespont, where Xerxes pass'd it o'er,
(A curb for ever to the pride of man)
Was by Leander not more hateful held
For floating, with inhospitable wave
'Twixt Sestus and Abydos, than by me
That flood, because it gave no passage thence.

"Strangers ye come, and haply in this place,
That cradled human nature in its birth,
Wond'ring, ye not without suspicion view

My smiles: but that sweet strain of psalmody,
'Thou, Lord! hast made me glad,' will give ye light,
Which may uncloud your minds. And thou, who stand'st
The foremost, and didst make thy suit to me,
Say if aught else thou wish to hear: for I
Came prompt to answer every doubt of thine."

She spake; and I replied: "I know not how
To reconcile this wave and rustling sound
Of forest leaves, with what I late have heard
Of opposite report." She answering thus:
"I will unfold the cause, whence that proceeds,
Which makes thee wonder; and so purge the cloud
That hath enwraps thee. The First Good, whose joy
Is only in himself, created man
For happiness, and gave this goodly place,
His pledge and earnest of eternal peace.
Favour'd thus highly, through his own defect
He fell, and here made short sojourn; he fell,
And, for the bitterness of sorrow, chang'd
Laughter unblam'd and ever-new delight.
That vapours none, exhal'd from earth beneath,
Or from the waters (which, wherever heat
Attracts them, follow), might ascend thus far
To vex man's peaceful state, this mountain rose
So high toward the heav'n, nor fears the rage
Of elements contending, from that part

Exempted, where the gate his limit bars.
Because the circumambient air throughout
With its first impulse circles still, unless
Aught interpose to cheek or thwart its course;
Upon the summit, which on every side
To visitation of th' impassive air
Is open, doth that motion strike, and makes
Beneath its sway th' umbrageous wood resound:
And in the shaken plant such power resides,
That it impregnates with its efficacy
The voyaging breeze, upon whose subtle plume
That wafted flies abroad; and th' other land
Receiving (as 't is worthy in itself,
Or in the clime, that warms it), doth conceive,
And from its womb produces many a tree
Of various virtue. This when thou hast heard,
The marvel ceases, if in yonder earth
Some plant without apparent seed be found
To fix its fibrous stem. And further learn,
That with prolific foison of all seeds,
This holy plain is fill'd, and in itself
Bears fruit that ne'er was pluck'd on other soil.
The water, thou behold'st, springs not from vein,
As stream, that intermittently repairs
And spends his pulse of life, but issues forth
From fountain, solid, undecaying, sure;
And by the will omnific, full supply

Feeds whatsoe'er On either side it pours;
On this devolv'd with power to take away
Remembrance of offence, on that to bring
Remembrance back of every good deed done.
From whence its name of Lethe on this part;
On th' other Eunoe: both of which must first
Be tasted ere it work; the last exceeding
All flavours else. Albeit thy thirst may now
Be well contented, if I here break off,
No more revealing: yet a corollary
I freely give beside: nor deem my words
Less grateful to thee, if they somewhat pass
The stretch of promise. They, whose verse of yore
The golden age recorded and its bliss,
On the Parnassian mountain, of this place
Perhaps had dream'd. Here was man guiltless, here
Perpetual spring and every fruit, and this
The far-fam'd nectar." Turning to the bards,
When she had ceas'd, I noted in their looks
A smile at her conclusion; then my face
Again directed to the lovely dame.