

The very tongue, whose keen reproof before  
Had wounded me, that either cheek was stain'd,  
Now minister'd my cure. So have I heard,  
Achilles and his father's javelin caus'd  
Pain first, and then the boon of health restor'd.

Turning our back upon the vale of woe,  
We cross'd th' encircled mound in silence. There  
Was twilight dim, that far long the gloom  
Mine eye advanc'd not: but I heard a horn  
Sounded aloud. The peal it blew had made  
The thunder feeble. Following its course  
The adverse way, my strained eyes were bent  
On that one spot. So terrible a blast  
Orlando blew not, when that dismal rout  
O'erthrew the host of Charlemagne, and quench'd  
His saintly warfare. Thitherward not long  
My head was rais'd, when many lofty towers  
Methought I spied. "Master," said I, "what land  
Is this?" He answer'd straight: "Too long a space  
Of intervening darkness has thine eye  
To traverse: thou hast therefore widely err'd  
In thy imagining. Thither arriv'd  
Thou well shalt see, how distance can delude  
The sense. A little therefore urge thee on."

Then tenderly he caught me by the hand;

“Yet know,” said he, “ere farther we advance,  
That it less strange may seem, these are not towers,  
But giants. In the pit they stand immers’d,  
Each from his navel downward, round the bank.”

As when a fog disperseth gradually,  
Our vision traces what the mist involves  
Condens’d in air; so piercing through the gross  
And gloomy atmosphere, as more and more  
We near’d toward the brink, mine error fled,  
And fear came o’er me. As with circling round  
Of turrets, Monterey crowns his walls,  
E’en thus the shore, encompassing th’ abyss,  
Was turreted with giants, half their length  
Uprearing, horrible, whom Jove from heav’n  
Yet threatens, when his mutt’ring thunder rolls.

Of one already I descried the face,  
Shoulders, and breast, and of the belly huge  
Great part, and both arms down along his ribs.

All-teeming nature, when her plastic hand  
Left framing of these monsters, did display  
Past doubt her wisdom, taking from mad War  
Such slaves to do his bidding; and if she  
Repent her not of th’ elephant and whale,  
Who ponders well confesses her therein

Wiser and more discreet; for when brute force  
And evil will are back'd with subtlety,  
Resistance none avails. His visage seem'd  
In length and bulk, as doth the pine, that tops  
Saint Peter's Roman fane; and th' other bones  
Of like proportion, so that from above  
The bank, which girdled him below, such height  
Arose his stature, that three Friezelanders  
Had striv'n in vain to reach but to his hair.  
Full thirty ample palms was he expos'd  
Downward from whence a man his garments loops.  
"Raphel bai ameth sabi almi,"  
So shouted his fierce lips, which sweeter hymns  
Became not; and my guide address'd him thus:

"O senseless spirit! let thy horn for thee  
Interpret: therewith vent thy rage, if rage  
Or other passion wring thee. Search thy neck,  
There shalt thou find the belt that binds it on.  
Wild spirit! lo, upon thy mighty breast  
Where hangs the baldrick!" Then to me he spake:  
"He doth accuse himself. Nimrod is this,  
Through whose ill counsel in the world no more  
One tongue prevails. But pass we on, nor waste  
Our words; for so each language is to him,  
As his to others, understood by none."

Then to the leftward turning sped we forth,  
And at a sling's throw found another shade  
Far fiercer and more huge. I cannot say  
What master hand had girt him; but he held  
Behind the right arm fetter'd, and before  
The other with a chain, that fasten'd him  
From the neck down, and five times round his form  
Apparent met the wreathed links. "This proud one  
Would of his strength against almighty Jove  
Make trial," said my guide; "whence he is thus  
Requited: Ephialtes him they call.

"Great was his prowess, when the giants brought  
Fear on the gods: those arms, which then he piled,  
Now moves he never." Forthwith I return'd:  
"Fain would I, if 't were possible, mine eyes  
Of Briareus immeasurable gain'd  
Experience next." He answer'd: "Thou shalt see  
Not far from hence Antaeus, who both speaks  
And is unfetter'd, who shall place us there  
Where guilt is at its depth. Far onward stands  
Whom thou wouldst fain behold, in chains, and made  
Like to this spirit, save that in his looks  
More fell he seems." By violent earthquake rock'd  
Ne'er shook a tow'r, so reeling to its base,  
As Ephialtes. More than ever then  
I dreaded death, nor than the terror more

Had needed, if I had not seen the cords  
That held him fast. We, straightway journeying on,  
Came to Antaeus, who five ells complete  
Without the head, forth issued from the cave.

“O thou, who in the fortunate vale, that made  
Great Scipio heir of glory, when his sword  
Drove back the troop of Hannibal in flight,  
Who thence of old didst carry for thy spoil  
An hundred lions; and if thou hadst fought  
In the high conflict on thy brethren’s side,  
Seems as men yet believ’d, that through thine arm  
The sons of earth had conquer’d, now vouchsafe  
To place us down beneath, where numbing cold  
Locks up Cocytus. Force not that we crave  
Or Tityus’ help or Typhon’s. Here is one  
Can give what in this realm ye covet. Stoop  
Therefore, nor scornfully distort thy lip.  
He in the upper world can yet bestow  
Renown on thee, for he doth live, and looks  
For life yet longer, if before the time  
Grace call him not unto herself.” Thus spake  
The teacher. He in haste forth stretch’d his hands,  
And caught my guide. Alcides whilom felt  
That grapple straighten’d score. Soon as my guide  
Had felt it, he bespake me thus: “This way  
That I may clasp thee;” then so caught me up,

That we were both one burden. As appears  
The tower of Carisenda, from beneath  
Where it doth lean, if chance a passing cloud  
So sail across, that opposite it hangs,  
Such then Antaeus seem'd, as at mine ease  
I mark'd him stooping. I were fain at times  
T' have pass'd another way. Yet in th' abyss,  
That Lucifer with Judas low ingulfs,  
lightly he plac'd us; nor there leaning stay'd,  
But rose as in a bark the stately mast.