

“O ye! in chosen fellowship advanc’d
To the great supper of the blessed Lamb,
Whereon who feeds hath every wish fulfill’d!
If to this man through God’s grace be vouchsaf’d
Foretaste of that, which from your table falls,
Or ever death his fated term prescribe;
Be ye not heedless of his urgent will;
But may some influence of your sacred dews
Sprinkle him. Of the fount ye always drink,
Whence flows what most he craves.” Beatrice spake,
And the rejoicing spirits, like to spheres
On firm-set poles revolving, trail’d a blaze
Of comet splendour; and as wheels, that wind
Their circles in the horologe, so work
The stated rounds, that to th’ observant eye
The first seems still, and, as it flew, the last;
E’en thus their carols weaving variously,
They by the measure pac’d, or swift, or slow,
Made me to rate the riches of their joy.

From that, which I did note in beauty most
Excelling, saw I issue forth a flame
So bright, as none was left more goodly there.
Round Beatrice thrice it wheel’d about,
With so divine a song, that fancy’s ear
Records it not; and the pen passeth on
And leaves a blank: for that our mortal speech,

Nor e'en the inward shaping of the brain,
Hath colours fine enough to trace such folds.

"O saintly sister mine! thy prayer devout
Is with so vehement affection urg'd,
Thou dost unbind me from that beauteous sphere."

Such were the accents towards my lady breath'd
From that blest ardour, soon as it was stay'd:
To whom she thus: "O everlasting light
Of him, within whose mighty grasp our Lord
Did leave the keys, which of this wondrous bliss
He bare below! tent this man, as thou wilt,
With lighter probe or deep, touching the faith,
By the which thou didst on the billows walk.
If he in love, in hope, and in belief,
Be steadfast, is not hid from thee: for thou
Hast there thy ken, where all things are beheld
In liveliest portraiture. But since true faith
Has peopled this fair realm with citizens,
Meet is, that to exalt its glory more,
Thou in his audience shouldst thereof discourse."

Like to the bachelor, who arms himself,
And speaks not, till the master have propos'd
The question, to approve, and not to end it;
So I, in silence, arm'd me, while she spake,

Summoning up each argument to aid;
As was behooveful for such questioner,
And such profession: "As good Christian ought,
Declare thee, What is faith?" Whereat I rais'd
My forehead to the light, whence this had breath'd,
Then turn'd to Beatrice, and in her looks
Approval met, that from their inmost fount
I should unlock the waters. "May the grace,
That giveth me the captain of the church
For confessor," said I, "vouchsafe to me
Apt utterance for my thoughts!" then added: "Sire!
E'en as set down by the unerring style
Of thy dear brother, who with thee conspir'd
To bring Rome in unto the way of life,
Faith of things hop'd is substance, and the proof
Of things not seen; and herein doth consist
Methinks its essence,"—"Rightly hast thou deem'd,"
Was answer'd: "if thou well discern, why first
He hath defin'd it, substance, and then proof."

"The deep things," I replied, "which here I scan
Distinctly, are below from mortal eye
So hidden, they have in belief alone
Their being, on which credence hope sublime
Is built; and therefore substance it intends.
And inasmuch as we must needs infer
From such belief our reasoning, all respect

To other view excluded, hence of proof
Th' intention is deriv'd." Forthwith I heard:
"If thus, whate'er by learning men attain,
Were understood, the sophist would want room
To exercise his wit." So breath'd the flame
Of love: then added: "Current is the coin
Thou utter'st, both in weight and in alloy.
But tell me, if thou hast it in thy purse."

"Even so glittering and so round," said I,
"I not a whit misdoubt of its assay."

Next issued from the deep imbosom'd splendour:
"Say, whence the costly jewel, on the which
Is founded every virtue, came to thee."
"The flood," I answer'd, "from the Spirit of God
Rain'd down upon the ancient bond and new,—
Here is the reas'ning, that convinceth me
So feelingly, each argument beside
Seems blunt and forceless in comparison."
Then heard I: "Wherefore holdest thou that each,
The elder proposition and the new,
Which so persuade thee, are the voice of heav'n?"

"The works, that follow'd, evidence their truth;"
I answer'd: "Nature did not make for these
The iron hot, or on her anvil mould them."

“Who voucheth to thee of the works themselves,”
Was the reply, “that they in very deed
Are that they purport? None hath sworn so to thee.”

“That all the world,” said I, “should have been turn’d
To Christian, and no miracle been wrought,
Would in itself be such a miracle,
The rest were not an hundredth part so great.
E’en thou wentst forth in poverty and hunger
To set the goodly plant, that from the vine,
It once was, now is grown unsightly bramble.”
That ended, through the high celestial court
Resounded all the spheres. “Praise we one God!”
In song of most unearthly melody.
And when that Worthy thus, from branch to branch,
Examining, had led me, that we now
Approach’d the topmost bough, he straight resum’d;
“The grace, that holds sweet dalliance with thy soul,
So far discreetly hath thy lips unclos’d
That, whatsoe’er has past them, I commend.
Behooves thee to express, what thou believ’st,
The next, and whereon thy belief hath grown.”

“O saintly sire and spirit!” I began,
“Who seest that, which thou didst so believe,
As to outstrip feet younger than thine own,
Toward the sepulchre? thy will is here,

That I the tenour of my creed unfold;
And thou the cause of it hast likewise ask'd.
And I reply: I in one God believe,
One sole eternal Godhead, of whose love
All heav'n is mov'd, himself unmov'd the while.
Nor demonstration physical alone,
Or more intelligential and abstruse,
Persuades me to this faith; but from that truth
It cometh to me rather, which is shed
Through Moses, the rapt Prophets, and the Psalms.
The Gospel, and that ye yourselves did write,
When ye were gifted of the Holy Ghost.
In three eternal Persons I believe,
Essence threefold and one, mysterious league
Of union absolute, which, many a time,
The word of gospel lore upon my mind
Imprints: and from this germ, this firstling spark,
The lively flame dilates, and like heav'n's star
Doth glitter in me." As the master hears,
Well pleas'd, and then enfoldeth in his arms
The servant, who hath joyful tidings brought,
And having told the errand keeps his peace;
Thus benediction uttering with song
Soon as my peace I held, compass'd me thrice
The apostolic radiance, whose behest
Had op'd lips; so well their answer pleas'd.