

Now was the hour that wakens fond desire
In men at sea, and melts their thoughtful heart,
Who in the morn have bid sweet friends farewell,
And pilgrim newly on his road with love
Thrills, if he hear the vesper bell from far,
That seems to mourn for the expiring day:
When I, no longer taking heed to hear
Began, with wonder, from those spirits to mark
One risen from its seat, which with its hand
Audience implor'd. Both palms it join'd and rais'd,
Fixing its steadfast gaze towards the east,
As telling God, "I care for naught beside."
"Te Lucis Ante," so devoutly then
Came from its lip, and in so soft a strain,
That all my sense in ravishment was lost.
And the rest after, softly and devout,
Follow'd through all the hymn, with upward gaze
Directed to the bright supernal wheels.
Here, reader! for the truth makes thine eyes keen:
For of so subtle texture is this veil,
That thou with ease mayst pass it through unmark'd.
I saw that gentle band silently next
Look up, as if in expectation held,
Pale and in lowly guise; and from on high
I saw forth issuing descend beneath
Two angels with two flame-illumin'd swords,
Broken and mutilated at their points.

Green as the tender leaves but newly born,
Their vesture was, the which by wings as green
Beaten, they drew behind them, fann'd in air.
A little over us one took his stand,
The other lighted on the' Opposing hill,
So that the troop were in the midst contain'd.
Well I descried the whiteness on their heads;
But in their visages the dazzled eye
Was lost, as faculty that by too much
Is overpower'd. "From Mary's bosom both
Are come," exclaim'd Sordello, "as a guard
Over the vale, ganst him, who hither tends,
The serpent." Whence, not knowing by which path
He came, I turn'd me round, and closely press'd,
All frozen, to my leader's trusted side.
Sordello paus'd not: "To the valley now
(For it is time) let us descend; and hold
Converse with those great shadows: haply much
Their sight may please ye." Only three steps down
Methinks I measur'd, ere I was beneath,
And noted one who look'd as with desire
To know me. Time was now that air arrow dim;
Yet not so dim, that 'twixt his eyes and mine
It clear'd not up what was conceal'd before.
Mutually tow'rds each other we advanc'd.
Nino, thou courteous judge! what joy I felt,
When I perceiv'd thou wert not with the bad!

No salutation kind on either part
Was left unsaid. He then inquir'd: "How long
Since thou arriv'd'st at the mountain's foot,
Over the distant waves?"—"O!" answer'd I,
"Through the sad seats of woe this morn I came,
And still in my first life, thus journeying on,
The other strive to gain." Soon as they heard
My words, he and Sordello backward drew,
As suddenly amaz'd. To Virgil one,
The other to a spirit turn'd, who near
Was seated, crying: "Conrad! up with speed:
Come, see what of his grace high God hath will'd."
Then turning round to me: "By that rare mark
Of honour which thou ow'st to him, who hides
So deeply his first cause, it hath no ford,
When thou shalt be beyond the vast of waves.
Tell my Giovanna, that for me she call
There, where reply to innocence is made.
Her mother, I believe, loves me no more;
Since she has chang'd the white and wimpled folds,
Which she is doom'd once more with grief to wish.
By her it easily may be perceiv'd,
How long in women lasts the flame of love,
If sight and touch do not relume it oft.
For her so fair a burial will not make
The viper which calls Milan to the field,
As had been made by shrill Gallura's bird."

He spoke, and in his visage took the stamp
Of that right seal, which with due temperature
Glowed in the bosom. My insatiate eyes
Meanwhile to heav'n had travel'd, even there
Where the bright stars are slowest, as a wheel
Nearest the axle; when my guide inquir'd:
"What there aloft, my son, has caught thy gaze?"
I answer'd: "The three torches, with which here
The pole is all on fire." He then to me:
"The four resplendent stars, thou saw'st this morn
Are there beneath, and these ris'n in their stead."
While yet he spoke. Sordello to himself
Drew him, and cry'd: "Lo there our enemy!"
And with his hand pointed that way to look.
Along the side, where barrier none arose
Around the little vale, a serpent lay,
Such haply as gave Eve the bitter food.
Between the grass and flowers, the evil snake
Came on, reverting oft his lifted head;
And, as a beast that smoothes its polish'd coat,
Licking his hack. I saw not, nor can tell,
How those celestial falcons from their seat
Mov'd, but in motion each one well descried,
Hearing the air cut by their verdant plumes.
The serpent fled; and to their stations back
The angels up return'd with equal flight.

The Spirit (who to Nino, when he call'd,
Had come), from viewing me with fixed ken,
Through all that conflict, loosen'd not his sight.
"So may the lamp, which leads thee up on high,
Find, in thy destin'd lot, of wax so much,
As may suffice thee to the enamel's height."
It thus began: "If any certain news
Of Valdimagra and the neighbour part
Thou know'st, tell me, who once was mighty there
They call'd me Conrad Malaspina, not
That old one, but from him I sprang. The love
I bore my people is now here refin'd."
"In your dominions," I answer'd, "ne'er was I.
But through all Europe where do those men dwell,
To whom their glory is not manifest?
The fame, that honours your illustrious house,
Proclaims the nobles and proclaims the land;
So that he knows it who was never there.
I swear to you, so may my upward route
Prosper! your honour'd nation not impairs
The value of her coffer and her sword.
Nature and use give her such privilege,
That while the world is twisted from his course
By a bad head, she only walks aright,
And has the evil way in scorn." He then:
"Now pass thee on: sev'n times the tired sun
Revisits not the couch, which with four feet

The forked Aries covers, ere that kind

Opinion shall be nail'd into thy brain

With stronger nails than other's speech can drive,

If the sure course of judgment be not stay'd."