

So were mine eyes inebriate with view
Of the vast multitude, whom various wounds
Disfigur'd, that they long'd to stay and weep.

But Virgil rous'd me: "What yet gazest on?
Wherefore doth fasten yet thy sight below
Among the maim'd and miserable shades?
Thou hast not shewn in any chasm beside
This weakness. Know, if thou wouldst number them
That two and twenty miles the valley winds
Its circuit, and already is the moon
Beneath our feet: the time permitted now
Is short, and more not seen remains to see."

"If thou," I straight replied, "hadst weigh'd the cause
For which I look'd, thou hadst perchance excus'd
The tarrying still." My leader part pursu'd
His way, the while I follow'd, answering him,
And adding thus: "Within that cave I deem,
Whereon so fixedly I held my ken,
There is a spirit dwells, one of my blood,
Wailing the crime that costs him now so dear."

Then spake my master: "Let thy soul no more
Afflict itself for him. Direct elsewhere
Its thought, and leave him. At the bridge's foot
I mark'd how he did point with menacing look

At thee, and heard him by the others nam'd
Geri of Bello. Thou so wholly then
Wert busied with his spirit, who once rul'd
The towers of Hautefort, that thou lookedst not
That way, ere he was gone."—"O guide belov'd!
His violent death yet unaveng'd," said I,
"By any, who are partners in his shame,
Made him contemptuous: therefore, as I think,
He pass'd me speechless by; and doing so
Hath made me more compassionate his fate."

So we discours'd to where the rock first show'd
The other valley, had more light been there,
E'en to the lowest depth. Soon as we came
O'er the last cloister in the dismal rounds
Of Malebolge, and the brotherhood
Were to our view expos'd, then many a dart
Of sore lament assail'd me, headed all
With points of thrilling pity, that I clos'd
Both ears against the volley with mine hands.

As were the torment, if each lazar-house
Of Valdichiana, in the sultry time
'Twixt July and September, with the isle
Sardinia and Maremma's pestilent fen,
Had heap'd their maladies all in one foss
Together; such was here the torment: dire

The stench, as issuing steams from fester'd limbs.

We on the utmost shore of the long rock
Descended still to leftward. Then my sight
Was livelier to explore the depth, wherein
The minister of the most mighty Lord,
All-searching Justice, dooms to punishment
The forgers noted on her dread record.

More rueful was it not methinks to see
The nation in Aegina droop, what time
Each living thing, e'en to the little worm,
All fell, so full of malice was the air
(And afterward, as bards of yore have told,
The ancient people were restor'd anew
From seed of emmets) than was here to see
The spirits, that languish'd through the murky vale
Up-pil'd on many a stack. Confus'd they lay,
One o'er the belly, o'er the shoulders one
Roll'd of another; sideling crawl'd a third
Along the dismal pathway. Step by step
We journey'd on, in silence looking round
And list'ning those diseas'd, who strove in vain
To lift their forms. Then two I mark'd, that sat
Propp'd 'gainst each other, as two brazen pans
Set to retain the heat. From head to foot,
A tetter bark'd them round. Nor saw I e'er

Groom currying so fast, for whom his lord
Impatient waited, or himself perchance
Tir'd with long watching, as of these each one
Plied quickly his keen nails, through furiousness
Of ne'er abated pruriency. The crust
Came drawn from underneath in flakes, like scales
Scrap'd from the bream or fish of broader mail.

"O thou, who with thy fingers rendest off
Thy coat of proof," thus spake my guide to one,
"And sometimes makest tearing pincers of them,
Tell me if any born of Latian land
Be among these within: so may thy nails
Serve thee for everlasting to this toil."

"Both are of Latium," weeping he replied,
"Whom tortur'd thus thou seest: but who art thou
That hast inquir'd of us?" To whom my guide:
"One that descend with this man, who yet lives,
From rock to rock, and show him hell's abyss."

Then started they asunder, and each turn'd
Trembling toward us, with the rest, whose ear
Those words redounding struck. To me my liege
Address'd him: "Speak to them whate'er thou list."

And I therewith began: "So may no time

Filch your remembrance from the thoughts of men
In th' upper world, but after many suns
Survive it, as ye tell me, who ye are,
And of what race ye come. Your punishment,
Unseemly and disgustful in its kind,
Deter you not from opening thus much to me."

"Arezzo was my dwelling," answer'd one,
"And me Albergo of Sienna brought
To die by fire; but that, for which I died,
Leads me not here. True is in sport I told him,
That I had learn'd to wing my flight in air.
And he admiring much, as he was void
Of wisdom, will'd me to declare to him
The secret of mine art: and only hence,
Because I made him not a Daedalus,
Prevail'd on one suppos'd his sire to burn me.
But Minos to this chasm last of the ten,
For that I practis'd alchemy on earth,
Has doom'd me. Him no subterfuge eludes."

Then to the bard I spake: "Was ever race
Light as Sienna's? Sure not France herself
Can show a tribe so frivolous and vain."

The other leprous spirit heard my words,
And thus return'd: "Be Stricca from this charge

Exempted, he who knew so temp'rately
To lay out fortune's gifts; and Niccolo
Who first the spice's costly luxury
Discover'd in that garden, where such seed
Roots deepest in the soil: and be that troop
Exempted, with whom Caccia of Asciano
Lavish'd his vineyards and wide-spreading woods,
And his rare wisdom Abbagliato show'd
A spectacle for all. That thou mayst know
Who seconds thee against the Siennese
Thus gladly, bend this way thy sharpen'd sight,
That well my face may answer to thy ken;
So shalt thou see I am Capocchio's ghost,
Who forg'd transmuted metals by the power
Of alchemy; and if I scan thee right,
Thus needs must well remember how I aped
Creative nature by my subtle art."