

While singly thus along the rim we walk'd,
Oft the good master warn'd me: "Look thou well.
Avail it that I caution thee." The sun
Now all the western clime irradiate chang'd
From azure tinct to white; and, as I pass'd,
My passing shadow made the umber'd flame
Burn ruddier. At so strange a sight I mark'd
That many a spirit marvel'd on his way.

This bred occasion first to speak of me,
"He seems," said they, "no insubstantial frame:"
Then to obtain what certainty they might,
Stretch'd towards me, careful not to overpass
The burning pale. "O thou, who followest
The others, haply not more slow than they,
But mov'd by rev'rence, answer me, who burn
In thirst and fire: nor I alone, but these
All for thine answer do more thirst, than doth
Indian or Aethiop for the cooling stream.
Tell us, how is it that thou mak'st thyself
A wall against the sun, as thou not yet
Into th' inextricable toils of death
Hadst enter'd?" Thus spake one, and I had straight
Declar'd me, if attention had not turn'd
To new appearance. Meeting these, there came,
Midway the burning path, a crowd, on whom
Earnestly gazing, from each part I view

The shadows all press forward, sev'rally
Each snatch a hasty kiss, and then away.
E'en so the emmets, 'mid their dusky troops,
Peer closely one at other, to spy out
Their mutual road perchance, and how they thrive.

That friendly greeting parted, ere dispatch
Of the first onward step, from either tribe
Loud clamour rises: those, who newly come,
Shout "Sodom and Gomorrah!" these, "The cow
Pasiphae enter'd, that the beast she woo'd
Might rush unto her luxury." Then as cranes,
That part towards the Rhiphaean mountains fly,
Part towards the Lybic sands, these to avoid
The ice, and those the sun; so hasteth off
One crowd, advances th' other; and resume
Their first song weeping, and their several shout.

Again drew near my side the very same,
Who had erewhile besought me, and their looks
Mark'd eagerness to listen. I, who twice
Their will had noted, spake: "O spirits secure,
Whene'er the time may be, of peaceful end!
My limbs, nor crude, nor in mature old age,
Have I left yonder: here they bear me, fed
With blood, and sinew-strung. That I no more
May live in blindness, hence I tend aloft.

There is a dame on high, who wind for us
This grace, by which my mortal through your realm
I bear. But may your utmost wish soon meet
Such full fruition, that the orb of heaven,
Fullest of love, and of most ample space,
Receive you, as ye tell (upon my page
Henceforth to stand recorded) who ye are,
And what this multitude, that at your backs
Have past behind us." As one, mountain-bred,
Rugged and clownish, if some city's walls
He chance to enter, round him stares agape,
Confounded and struck dumb; e'en such appear'd
Each spirit. But when rid of that amaze,
(Not long the inmate of a noble heart)
He, who before had question'd, thus resum'd:
"O blessed, who, for death preparing, tak'st
Experience of our limits, in thy bark!
Their crime, who not with us proceed, was that,
For which, as he did triumph, Caesar heard
The snout of 'queen,' to taunt him. Hence their cry
Of 'Sodom,' as they parted, to rebuke
Themselves, and aid the burning by their shame.
Our sinning was Hermaphrodite: but we,
Because the law of human kind we broke,
Following like beasts our vile concupiscence,
Hence parting from them, to our own disgrace
Record the name of her, by whom the beast

In bestial tire was acted. Now our deeds
Thou know'st, and how we sinn'd. If thou by name
Wouldst haply know us, time permits not now
To tell so much, nor can I. Of myself
Learn what thou wishest. Guinicelli I,
Who having truly sorrow'd ere my last,
Already cleanse me." With such pious joy,
As the two sons upon their mother gaz'd
From sad Lycurgus rescu'd, such my joy
(Save that I more repress it) when I heard
From his own lips the name of him pronounc'd,
Who was a father to me, and to those
My betters, who have ever us'd the sweet
And pleasant rhymes of love. So nought I heard
Nor spake, but long time thoughtfully I went,
Gazing on him; and, only for the fire,
Approach'd not nearer. When my eyes were fed
By looking on him, with such solemn pledge,
As forces credence, I devoted me
Unto his service wholly. In reply
He thus bespake me: "What from thee I hear
Is grav'd so deeply on my mind, the waves
Of Lethe shall not wash it off, nor make
A whit less lively. But as now thy oath
Has seal'd the truth, declare what cause impels
That love, which both thy looks and speech bewray."

“Those dulcet lays,” I answer’d, “which, as long
As of our tongue the beauty does not fade,
Shall make us love the very ink that trac’d them.”

“Brother!” he cried, and pointed at a shade
Before him, “there is one, whose mother speech
Doth owe to him a fairer ornament.
He in love ditties and the tales of prose
Without a rival stands, and lets the fools
Talk on, who think the songster of Limoges
O’ertops him. Rumour and the popular voice
They look to more than truth, and so confirm
Opinion, ere by art or reason taught.
Thus many of the elder time cried up
Guittone, giving him the prize, till truth
By strength of numbers vanquish’d. If thou own
So ample privilege, as to have gain’d
Free entrance to the cloister, whereof Christ
Is Abbot of the college, say to him
One paternoster for me, far as needs
For dwellers in this world, where power to sin
No longer tempts us.” Haply to make way
For one, that follow’d next, when that was said,
He vanish’d through the fire, as through the wave
A fish, that glances diving to the deep.

I, to the spirit he had shown me, drew

A little onward, and besought his name,
For which my heart, I said, kept gracious room.
He frankly thus began: "Thy courtesy
So wins on me, I have nor power nor will
To hide me. I am Arnault; and with songs,
Sorely lamenting for my folly past,
Thorough this ford of fire I wade, and see
The day, I hope for, smiling in my view.
I pray ye by the worth that guides ye up
Unto the summit of the scale, in time
Remember ye my suff'rings." With such words
He disappear'd in the refining flame.