

In fashion, as a snow-white rose, lay then
Before my view the saintly multitude,
Which in his own blood Christ espous'd. Meanwhile
That other host, that soar aloft to gaze
And celebrate his glory, whom they love,
Hover'd around; and, like a troop of bees,
Amid the vernal sweets alighting now,
Now, clustering, where their fragrant labour glows,
Flew downward to the mighty flow'r, or rose
From the redundant petals, streaming back
Unto the steadfast dwelling of their joy.
Faces had they of flame, and wings of gold;
The rest was whiter than the driven snow.
And as they flitted down into the flower,
From range to range, fanning their plummy loins,
Whisper'd the peace and ardour, which they won
From that soft winnowing. Shadow none, the vast
Interposition of such numerous flight
Cast, from above, upon the flower, or view
Obstructed aught. For, through the universe,
Wherever merited, celestial light
Glides freely, and no obstacle prevents.

All there, who reign in safety and in bliss,
Ages long past or new, on one sole mark
Their love and vision fix'd. O trinal beam
Of individual star, that charmst them thus,

Vouchsafe one glance to gild our storm below!

If the grim brood, from Arctic shores that roam'd,

(Where helice, forever, as she wheels,

Sparkles a mother's fondness on her son)

Stood in mute wonder 'mid the works of Rome,

When to their view the Lateran arose

In greatness more than earthly; I, who then

From human to divine had past, from time

Unto eternity, and out of Florence

To justice and to truth, how might I choose

But marvel too? 'Twixt gladness and amaze,

In sooth no will had I to utter aught,

Or hear. And, as a pilgrim, when he rests

Within the temple of his vow, looks round

In breathless awe, and hopes some time to tell

Of all its goodly state: e'en so mine eyes

Cours'd up and down along the living light,

Now low, and now aloft, and now around,

Visiting every step. Looks I beheld,

Where charity in soft persuasion sat,

Smiles from within and radiance from above,

And in each gesture grace and honour high.

So rov'd my ken, and its general form

All Paradise survey'd: when round I turn'd

With purpose of my lady to inquire

Once more of things, that held my thought suspense,
But answer found from other than I ween'd;
For, Beatrice, when I thought to see,
I saw instead a senior, at my side,
Rob'd, as the rest, in glory. Joy benign
Glow'd in his eye, and o'er his cheek diffus'd,
With gestures such as spake a father's love.
And, "Whither is she vanish'd?" straight I ask'd.

"By Beatrice summon'd," he replied,
"I come to aid thy wish. Looking aloft
To the third circle from the highest, there
Behold her on the throne, wherein her merit
Hath plac'd her." Answering not, mine eyes I rais'd,
And saw her, where aloof she sat, her brow
A wreath reflecting of eternal beams.
Not from the centre of the sea so far
Unto the region of the highest thunder,
As was my ken from hers; and yet the form
Came through that medium down, unmix'd and pure,

"O Lady! thou in whom my hopes have rest!
Who, for my safety, hast not scorn'd, in hell
To leave the traces of thy footsteps mark'd!
For all mine eyes have seen, I, to thy power
And goodness, virtue owe and grace. Of slave,
Thou hast to freedom brought me; and no means,

For my deliverance apt, hast left untried.
Thy liberal bounty still toward me keep.
That, when my spirit, which thou madest whole,
Is loosen'd from this body, it may find
Favour with thee." So I my suit preferr'd:
And she, so distant, as appear'd, look'd down,
And smil'd; then tow'rds th' eternal fountain turn'd.

And thus the senior, holy and rever'd:
"That thou at length mayst happily conclude
Thy voyage (to which end I was dispatch'd,
By supplication mov'd and holy love)
Let thy upsoaring vision range, at large,
This garden through: for so, by ray divine
Kindled, thy ken a higher flight shall mount;
And from heav'n's queen, whom fervent I adore,
All gracious aid befriend us; for that I
Am her own faithful Bernard." Like a wight,
Who haply from Croatia wends to see
Our Veronica, and the while 't is shown,
Hangs over it with never-sated gaze,
And, all that he hath heard revolving, saith
Unto himself in thought: "And didst thou look
E'en thus, O Jesus, my true Lord and God?
And was this semblance thine?" So gaz'd I then
Adoring; for the charity of him,
Who musing, in the world that peace enjoy'd,

Stood lively before me. "Child of grace!"
Thus he began: "thou shalt not knowledge gain
Of this glad being, if thine eyes are held
Still in this depth below. But search around
The circles, to the furthest, till thou spy
Seated in state, the queen, that of this realm
Is sovran." Straight mine eyes I rais'd; and bright,
As, at the birth of morn, the eastern clime
Above th' horizon, where the sun declines;
To mine eyes, that upward, as from vale
To mountain sped, at th' extreme bound, a part
Excell'd in lustre all the front oppos'd.
And as the glow burns ruddiest o'er the wave,
That waits the sloping beam, which Phaeton
Ill knew to guide, and on each part the light
Diminish'd fades, intensest in the midst;
So burn'd the peaceful oriflame, and slack'd
On every side the living flame decay'd.
And in that midst their sportive pennons wav'd
Thousands of angels; in resplendence each
Distinct, and quaint adornment. At their glee
And carol, smil'd the Lovely One of heav'n,
That joy was in the eyes of all the blest.

Had I a tongue in eloquence as rich,
As is the colouring in fancy's loom,
'T were all too poor to utter the least part

Of that enchantment. When he saw mine eyes
Intent on her, that charm'd him, Bernard gaz'd
With so exceeding fondness, as infus'd
Ardour into my breast, unfelt before.