

What time resentment burn'd in Juno's breast
For Semele against the Theban blood,
As more than once in dire mischance was rued,
Such fatal frenzy seiz'd on Athamas,
That he his spouse beholding with a babe
Laden on either arm, "Spread out," he cried,
"The meshes, that I take the lioness
And the young lions at the pass:" then forth
Stretch'd he his merciless talons, grasping one,
One helpless innocent, Learchus nam'd,
Whom swinging down he dash'd upon a rock,
And with her other burden self-destroy'd
The hapless mother plung'd: and when the pride
Of all-presuming Troy fell from its height,
By fortune overwhelm'd, and the old king
With his realm perish'd, then did Hecuba,
A wretch forlorn and captive, when she saw
Polyxena first slaughter'd, and her son,
Her Polydorus, on the wild sea-beach
Next met the mourner's view, then reft of sense
Did she run barking even as a dog;
Such mighty power had grief to wrench her soul.
Bet ne'er the Furies or of Thebes or Troy
With such fell cruelty were seen, their goads
Infixing in the limbs of man or beast,
As now two pale and naked ghost I saw
That gnarling wildly scamper'd, like the swine

Excluded from his sty. One reach'd Capocchio,
And in the neck-joint sticking deep his fangs,
Dragg'd him, that o'er the solid pavement rubb'd
His belly stretch'd out prone. The other shape,
He of Arezzo, there left trembling, spake;
"That sprite of air is Schicchi; in like mood
Of random mischief vents he still his spite."

To whom I answ'ring: "Oh! as thou dost hope,
The other may not flesh its jaws on thee,
Be patient to inform us, who it is,
Ere it speed hence."—"That is the ancient soul
Of wretched Myrrha," he replied, "who burn'd
With most unholy flame for her own sire,

"And a false shape assuming, so perform'd
The deed of sin; e'en as the other there,
That onward passes, dar'd to counterfeit
Donati's features, to feign'd testament
The seal affixing, that himself might gain,
For his own share, the lady of the herd."

When vanish'd the two furious shades, on whom
Mine eye was held, I turn'd it back to view
The other cursed spirits. One I saw
In fashion like a lute, had but the groin
Been sever'd, where it meets the forked part.

Swoln dropsy, disproportioning the limbs
With ill-converted moisture, that the paunch
Suits not the visage, open'd wide his lips
Gasping as in the hectic man for drought,
One towards the chin, the other upward curl'd.

“O ye, who in this world of misery,
Wherefore I know not, are exempt from pain,”
Thus he began, “attentively regard
Adamo's woe. When living, full supply
Ne'er lack'd me of what most I coveted;
One drop of water now, alas! I crave.
The rills, that glitter down the grassy slopes
Of Casentino, making fresh and soft
The banks whereby they glide to Arno's stream,
Stand ever in my view; and not in vain;
For more the pictur'd semblance dries me up,
Much more than the disease, which makes the flesh
Desert these shrivel'd cheeks. So from the place,
Where I transgress'd, stern justice urging me,
Takes means to quicken more my lab'ring sighs.
There is Romena, where I falsified
The metal with the Baptist's form imprest,
For which on earth I left my body burnt.
But if I here might see the sorrowing soul
Of Guido, Alessandro, or their brother,
For Branda's limpid spring I would not change

The welcome sight. One is e'en now within,
If truly the mad spirits tell, that round
Are wand'ring. But wherein besteads me that?
My limbs are fetter'd. Were I but so light,
That I each hundred years might move one inch,
I had set forth already on this path,
Seeking him out amidst the shapeless crew,
Although eleven miles it wind, not more
Than half of one across. They brought me down
Among this tribe; induc'd by them I stamp'd
The florens with three carats of alloy."

"Who are that abject pair," I next inquir'd,
"That closely bounding thee upon thy right
Lie smoking, like a band in winter steep'd
In the chill stream?"—"When to this gulf I dropt,"
He answer'd, "here I found them; since that hour
They have not turn'd, nor ever shall, I ween,
Till time hath run his course. One is that dame
The false accuser of the Hebrew youth;
Sinon the other, that false Greek from Troy.
Sharp fever drains the reeky moistness out,
In such a cloud upsteam'd." When that he heard,
One, gall'd perchance to be so darkly nam'd,
With clench'd hand smote him on the braced paunch,
That like a drum resounded: but forthwith
Adamo smote him on the face, the blow

Returning with his arm, that seem'd as hard.

"Though my o'erweighty limbs have ta'en from me
The power to move," said he, "I have an arm
At liberty for such employ." To whom
Was answer'd: "When thou wentest to the fire,
Thou hadst it not so ready at command,
Then readier when it coin'd th' impostor gold."

And thus the dropsied: "Ay, now speak'st thou true.
But there thou gav'st not such true testimony,
When thou wast question'd of the truth, at Troy."

"If I spake false, thou falsely stamp'dst the coin,"
Said Sinon; "I am here but for one fault,
And thou for more than any imp beside."

"Remember," he replied, "O perjur'd one,
The horse remember, that did teem with death,
And all the world be witness to thy guilt."

"To thine," return'd the Greek, "witness the thirst
Whence thy tongue cracks, witness the fluid mound,
Rear'd by thy belly up before thine eyes,
A mass corrupt." To whom the coiner thus:
"Thy mouth gapes wide as ever to let pass
Its evil saying. Me if thirst assails,

Yet I am stuff'd with moisture. Thou art parch'd,
Pains rack thy head, no urging would'st thou need
To make thee lap Narcissus' mirror up."

I was all fix'd to listen, when my guide
Admonish'd: "Now beware: a little more,
And I do quarrel with thee." I perceiv'd
How angrily he spake, and towards him turn'd
With shame so poignant, as remember'd yet
Confounds me. As a man that dreams of harm
Befall'n him, dreaming wishes it a dream,
And that which is, desires as if it were not,
Such then was I, who wanting power to speak
Wish'd to excuse myself, and all the while
Excus'd me, though unweeting that I did.

"More grievous fault than thine has been, less shame,"
My master cried, "might expiate. Therefore cast
All sorrow from thy soul; and if again
Chance bring thee, where like conference is held,
Think I am ever at thy side. To hear
Such wrangling is a joy for vulgar minds."