

Now the fair consort of Tithonus old,
Arise from her mate's beloved arms,
Look'd palely o'er the eastern cliff: her brow,
Lucent with jewels, glitter'd, set in sign
Of that chill animal, who with his train
Smites fearful nations: and where then we were,
Two steps of her ascent the night had past,
And now the third was closing up its wing,
When I, who had so much of Adam with me,
Sank down upon the grass, o'ercome with sleep,
There where all five were seated. In that hour,
When near the dawn the swallow her sad lay,
Rememb'ring haply ancient grief, renews,
And with our minds more wand'ers from the flesh,
And less by thought restrain'd are, as 't were, full
Of holy divination in their dreams,
Then in a vision did I seem to view
A golden-feather'd eagle in the sky,
With open wings, and hov'ring for descent,
And I was in that place, methought, from whence
Young Ganymede, from his associates 'reft,
Was snatch'd aloft to the high consistory.
"Perhaps," thought I within me, "here alone
He strikes his quarry, and elsewhere disdains
To pounce upon the prey." Therewith, it seem'd,
A little wheeling in his airy tour
Terrible as the lightning rush'd he down,

And snatch'd me upward even to the fire.

There both, I thought, the eagle and myself
Did burn; and so intense th' imagin'd flames,
That needs my sleep was broken off. As erst
Achilles shook himself, and round him roll'd
His waken'd eyeballs wond'ring where he was,
Whenas his mother had from Chiron fled
To Scyros, with him sleeping in her arms;
E'en thus I shook me, soon as from my face
The slumber parted, turning deadly pale,
Like one ice-struck with dread. Solo at my side
My comfort stood: and the bright sun was now
More than two hours aloft: and to the sea
My looks were turn'd. "Fear not," my master cried,
"Assur'd we are at happy point. Thy strength
Shrink not, but rise dilated. Thou art come
To Purgatory now. Lo! there the cliff
That circling bounds it! Lo! the entrance there,
Where it doth seem disparted! Ere the dawn
Usher'd the daylight, when thy wearied soul
Slept in thee, o'er the flowery vale beneath
A lady came, and thus bespake me: I
Am Lucia. Suffer me to take this man,
Who slumbers. Easier so his way shall speed."
Sordello and the other gentle shapes
Tarrying, she bare thee up: and, as day shone,

This summit reach'd: and I pursued her steps.
Here did she place thee. First her lovely eyes
That open entrance show'd me; then at once
She vanish'd with thy sleep." Like one, whose doubts
Are chas'd by certainty, and terror turn'd
To comfort on discovery of the truth,
Such was the change in me: and as my guide
Beheld me fearless, up along the cliff
He mov'd, and I behind him, towards the height.
Reader! thou markest how my theme doth rise,
Nor wonder therefore, if more artfully
I prop the structure! Nearer now we drew,
Arriv'd' whence in that part, where first a breach
As of a wall appear'd, I could descry
A portal, and three steps beneath, that led
For inlet there, of different colour each,
And one who watch'd, but spake not yet a word.
As more and more mine eye did stretch its view,
I mark'd him seated on the highest step,
In visage such, as past my power to bear.

Grasp'd in his hand a naked sword, glanc'd back
The rays so toward me, that I oft in vain
My sight directed. "Speak from whence ye stand:"
He cried: "What would ye? Where is your escort?
Take heed your coming upward harm ye not."
"A heavenly dame, not skillless of these things,"

Replied the' instructor, "told us, even now,
'Pass that way: here the gate is."—"And may she
Befriending prosper your ascent," resum'd
The courteous keeper of the gate: "Come then
Before our steps." We straightway thither came.
The lowest stair was marble white so smooth
And polish'd, that therein my mirror'd form
Distinct I saw. The next of hue more dark
Than sablest grain, a rough and singed block,
Crack'd lengthwise and across. The third, that lay
Massy above, seem'd porphyry, that flam'd
Red as the life-blood spouting from a vein.
On this God's angel either foot sustain'd,
Upon the threshold seated, which appear'd
A rock of diamond. Up the trinal steps
My leader cheerily drew me. "Ask," said he,
"With humble heart, that he unbar the bolt."
Piously at his holy feet devolv'd
I cast me, praying him for pity's sake
That he would open to me: but first fell
Thrice on my bosom prostrate. Seven times
The letter, that denotes the inward stain,
He on my forehead with the blunted point
Of his drawn sword inscrib'd. And "Look," he cried,
"When enter'd, that thou wash these scars away."
Ashes, or earth ta'en dry out of the ground,
Were of one colour with the robe he wore.

From underneath that vestment forth he drew
Two keys of metal twain: the one was gold,
Its fellow silver. With the pallid first,
And next the burnish'd, he so ply'd the gate,
As to content me well. "Whenever one
Faileth of these, that in the keyhole straight
It turn not, to this alley then expect
Access in vain." Such were the words he spake.
"One is more precious: but the other needs
Skill and sagacity, large share of each,
Ere its good task to disengage the knot
Be worthily perform'd. From Peter these
I hold, of him instructed, that I err
Rather in opening than in keeping fast;
So but the suppliant at my feet implore."
Then of that hallow'd gate he thrust the door,
Exclaiming, "Enter, but this warning hear:
He forth again departs who looks behind."
As in the hinges of that sacred ward
The swivels turn'd, sonorous metal strong,
Harsh was the grating; nor so surlily
Roar'd the Tarpeian, when by force bereft
Of good Metellus, thenceforth from his loss
To leanness doom'd. Attentively I turn'd,
List'ning the thunder, that first issued forth;
And "We praise thee, O God," methought I heard
In accents blended with sweet melody.

The strains came o'er mine ear, e'en as the sound
Of choral voices, that in solemn chant
With organ mingle, and, now high and clear,
Come swelling, now float indistinct away.