

“After that Constantine the eagle turn’d  
Against the motions of the heav’n, that roll’d  
Consenting with its course, when he of yore,  
Lavinia’s spouse, was leader of the flight,  
A hundred years twice told and more, his seat  
At Europe’s extreme point, the bird of Jove  
Held, near the mountains, whence he issued first.  
There, under shadow of his sacred plumes  
Swaying the world, till through successive hands  
To mine he came devolv’d. Caesar I was,  
And am Justinian; destin’d by the will  
Of that prime love, whose influence I feel,  
From vain excess to clear th’ encumber’d laws.  
Or ere that work engag’d me, I did hold  
Christ’s nature merely human, with such faith  
Contented. But the blessed Agapete,  
Who was chief shepherd, he with warning voice  
To the true faith recall’d me. I believ’d  
His words: and what he taught, now plainly see,  
As thou in every contradiction seest  
The true and false oppos’d. Soon as my feet  
Were to the church reclaim’d, to my great task,  
By inspiration of God’s grace impell’d,  
I gave me wholly, and consign’d mine arms  
To Belisarius, with whom heaven’s right hand  
Was link’d in such conjointment, ’t was a sign  
That I should rest. To thy first question thus

I shape mine answer, which were ended here,  
But that its tendency doth prompt perforce  
To some addition; that thou well, mayst mark  
What reason on each side they have to plead,  
By whom that holiest banner is withstood,  
Both who pretend its power and who oppose.  
“Beginning from that hour, when Pallas died  
To give it rule, behold the valorous deeds  
Have made it worthy reverence. Not unknown  
To thee, how for three hundred years and more  
It dwelt in Alba, up to those fell lists  
Where for its sake were met the rival three;  
Nor aught unknown to thee, which it achiev’d  
Down to the Sabines’ wrong to Lucrece’ woe,  
With its sev’n kings conqu’ring the nation round;  
Nor all it wrought, by Roman worthies home  
’Gainst Brennus and th’ Epirot prince, and hosts  
Of single chiefs, or states in league combin’d  
Of social warfare; hence Torquatus stern,  
And Quintius nam’d of his neglected locks,  
The Decii, and the Fabii hence acquir’d  
Their fame, which I with duteous zeal embalm.  
By it the pride of Arab hordes was quell’d,  
When they led on by Hannibal o’erpass’d  
The Alpine rocks, whence glide thy currents, Po!  
Beneath its guidance, in their prime of days  
Scipio and Pompey triumph’d; and that hill,

Under whose summit thou didst see the light,  
Rued its stern bearing. After, near the hour,  
When heav'n was minded that o'er all the world  
His own deep calm should brood, to Caesar's hand  
Did Rome consign it; and what then it wrought  
From Var unto the Rhine, saw Isere's flood,  
Saw Loire and Seine, and every vale, that fills  
The torrent Rhone. What after that it wrought,  
When from Ravenna it came forth, and leap'd  
The Rubicon, was of so bold a flight,  
That tongue nor pen may follow it. Tow'rds Spain  
It wheel'd its bands, then tow'rd Dyrrachium smote,  
And on Pharsalia with so fierce a plunge,  
E'en the warm Nile was conscious to the pang;  
Its native shores Antandros, and the streams  
Of Simois revisited, and there  
Where Hector lies; then ill for Ptolemy  
His pennons shook again; lightning thence fell  
On Juba; and the next upon your west,  
At sound of the Pompeian trump, return'd.

"What following and in its next bearer's gripe  
It wrought, is now by Cassius and Brutus  
Bark'd off in hell, and by Perugia's sons  
And Modena's was mourn'd. Hence weepeth still  
Sad Cleopatra, who, pursued by it,  
Took from the adder black and sudden death.

With him it ran e'en to the Red Sea coast;  
With him compos'd the world to such a peace,  
That of his temple Janus barr'd the door.

"But all the mighty standard yet had wrought,  
And was appointed to perform thereafter,  
Throughout the mortal kingdom which it sway'd,  
Falls in appearance dwindled and obscur'd,  
If one with steady eye and perfect thought  
On the third Caesar look; for to his hands,  
The living Justice, in whose breath I move,  
Committed glory, e'en into his hands,  
To execute the vengeance of its wrath.

"Hear now and wonder at what next I tell.  
After with Titus it was sent to wreak  
Vengeance for vengeance of the ancient sin,  
And, when the Lombard tooth, with fangs impure,  
Did gore the bosom of the holy church,  
Under its wings victorious, Charlemagne  
Sped to her rescue. Judge then for thyself  
Of those, whom I erewhile accus'd to thee,  
What they are, and how grievous their offending,  
Who are the cause of all your ills. The one  
Against the universal ensign rears  
The yellow lilies, and with partial aim  
That to himself the other arrogates:

So that 't is hard to see which more offends.  
Be yours, ye Ghibellines, to veil your arts  
Beneath another standard: ill is this  
Follow'd of him, who severs it and justice:  
And let not with his Guelphs the new-crown'd Charles  
Assail it, but those talons hold in dread,  
Which from a lion of more lofty port  
Have rent the easing. Many a time ere now  
The sons have for the sire's transgression wail'd;  
Nor let him trust the fond belief, that heav'n  
Will truck its armour for his liliated shield.

"This little star is furnish'd with good spirits,  
Whose mortal lives were busied to that end,  
That honour and renown might wait on them:  
And, when desires thus err in their intention,  
True love must needs ascend with slacker beam.  
But it is part of our delight, to measure  
Our wages with the merit; and admire  
The close proportion. Hence doth heav'nly justice  
Temper so evenly affection in us,  
It ne'er can warp to any wrongfulness.  
Of diverse voices is sweet music made:  
So in our life the different degrees  
Render sweet harmony among these wheels.

"Within the pearl, that now encloseth us,

Shines Romeo's light, whose goodly deed and fair  
Met ill acceptance. But the Provençals,  
That were his foes, have little cause for mirth.  
Ill shapes that man his course, who makes his wrong  
Of other's worth. Four daughters were there born  
To Raymond Berenger, and every one  
Became a queen; and this for him did Romeo,  
Though of mean state and from a foreign land.  
Yet envious tongues incited him to ask  
A reckoning of that just one, who return'd  
Twelve fold to him for ten. Aged and poor  
He parted thence: and if the world did know  
The heart he had, begging his life by morsels,  
'T would deem the praise, it yields him, scanty dealt."