

On the green leaf mine eyes were fix'd, like his
Who throws away his days in idle chase
Of the diminutive, when thus I heard
The more than father warn me: "Son! our time
Asks thriftier using. Linger not: away."

Thereat my face and steps at once I turn'd
Toward the sages, by whose converse cheer'd
I journey'd on, and felt no toil: and lo!
A sound of weeping and a song: "My lips,
O Lord!" and these so mingled, it gave birth
To pleasure and to pain. "O Sire, belov'd!
Say what is this I hear?" Thus I inquir'd.

"Spirits," said he, "who as they go, perchance,
Their debt of duty pay." As on their road
The thoughtful pilgrims, overtaking some
Not known unto them, turn to them, and look,
But stay not; thus, approaching from behind
With speedier motion, eyed us, as they pass'd,
A crowd of spirits, silent and devout.
The eyes of each were dark and hollow: pale
Their visage, and so lean withal, the bones
Stood staring thro' the skin. I do not think
Thus dry and meagre Erisichthon show'd,
When pinc'ed by sharp-set famine to the quick.

“Lo!” to myself I mus’d, “the race, who lost
Jerusalem, when Mary with dire beak
Prey’d on her child.” The sockets seem’d as rings,
From which the gems were drops. Who reads the name
Of man upon his forehead, there the M
Had trac’d most plainly. Who would deem, that scent
Of water and an apple, could have prov’d
Powerful to generate such pining want,
Not knowing how it wrought? While now I stood
Wond’ring what thus could waste them (for the cause
Of their gaunt hollowness and scaly rind
Appear’d not) lo! a spirit turn’d his eyes
In their deep-sunken cell, and fasten’d then
On me, then cried with vehemence aloud:
“What grace is this vouchsaf’d me?” By his looks
I ne’er had recogniz’d him: but the voice
Brought to my knowledge what his cheer conceal’d.
Remembrance of his alter’d lineaments
Was kindled from that spark; and I agniz’d
The visage of Forese. “Ah! respect
This wan and leprous wither’d skin,” thus he
Suppliant implor’d, “this macerated flesh.
Speak to me truly of thyself. And who
Are those twain spirits, that escort thee there?
Be it not said thou Scorn’st to talk with me.”

“That face of thine,” I answer’d him, “which dead

I once bewail'd, disposes me not less
For weeping, when I see It thus transform'd.
Say then, by Heav'n, what blasts ye thus? The whilst
I wonder, ask not Speech from me: unapt
Is he to speak, whom other will employs."

He thus: "The water and tree plant we pass'd,
Virtue possesses, by th' eternal will
Infus'd, the which so pines me. Every spirit,
Whose song bewails his gluttony indulg'd
Too grossly, here in hunger and in thirst
Is purified. The odour, which the fruit,
And spray, that showers upon the verdure, breathe,
Inflames us with desire to feed and drink.
Nor once alone encompassing our route
We come to add fresh fuel to the pain:
Pain, said I? solace rather: for that will
To the tree leads us, by which Christ was led
To call Elias, joyful when he paid
Our ransom from his vein." I answering thus:
"Forese! from that day, in which the world
For better life thou changedst, not five years
Have circled. If the power of sinning more
Were first concluded in thee, ere thou knew'st
That kindly grief, which re-espouses us
To God, how hither art thou come so soon?
I thought to find thee lower, there, where time

Is recompense for time." He straight replied:
"To drink up the sweet wormwood of affliction
I have been brought thus early by the tears
Stream'd down my Nella's cheeks. Her prayers devout,
Her sighs have drawn me from the coast, where oft
Expectance lingers, and have set me free
From th' other circles. In the sight of God
So much the dearer is my widow priz'd,
She whom I lov'd so fondly, as she ranks
More singly eminent for virtuous deeds.
The tract most barb'rous of Sardinia's isle,
Hath dames more chaste and modester by far
Than that wherein I left her. O sweet brother!
What wouldst thou have me say? A time to come
Stands full within my view, to which this hour
Shall not be counted of an ancient date,
When from the pulpit shall be loudly warn'd
Th' unblushing dames of Florence, lest they bare
Unkerchief'd bosoms to the common gaze.
What savage women hath the world e'er seen,
What Saracens, for whom there needed scourge
Of spiritual or other discipline,
To force them walk with cov'ring on their limbs!
But did they see, the shameless ones, that Heav'n
Wafts on swift wing toward them, while I speak,
Their mouths were op'd for howling: they shall taste
Of Borrow (unless foresight cheat me here)

Or ere the cheek of him be cloth'd with down
Who is now rock'd with lullaby asleep.
Ah! now, my brother, hide thyself no more,
Thou seest how not I alone but all
Gaze, where thou veil'st the intercepted sun."

Whence I replied: "If thou recall to mind
What we were once together, even yet
Remembrance of those days may grieve thee sore.
That I forsook that life, was due to him
Who there precedes me, some few evenings past,
When she was round, who shines with sister lamp
To his, that glisters yonder," and I show'd
The sun. "Tis he, who through profoundest night
Of he true dead has brought me, with this flesh
As true, that follows. From that gloom the aid
Of his sure comfort drew me on to climb,
And climbing wind along this mountain-steep,
Which rectifies in you whate'er the world
Made crooked and deprav'd I have his word,
That he will bear me company as far
As till I come where Beatrice dwells:
But there must leave me. Virgil is that spirit,
Who thus hath promis'd," and I pointed to him;
"The other is that shade, for whom so late
Your realm, as he arose, exulting shook
Through every pendent cliff and rocky bound."