

Them sudden flight had scatter'd over the plain,
Turn'd tow'rds the mountain, whither reason's voice
Drives us; I to my faithful company
Adhering, left it not. For how of him
Depriv'd, might I have sped, or who beside
Would o'er the mountainous tract have led my steps
He with the bitter pang of self-remorse
Seem'd smitten. O clear conscience and upright
How doth a little fling wound thee sore!

Soon as his feet desisted (slack'ning pace),
From haste, that mars all decency of act,
My mind, that in itself before was wrapt,
Its thoughts expanded, as with joy restor'd:
And full against the steep ascent I set
My face, where highest to heav'n its top o'erflows.

The sun, that flar'd behind, with ruddy beam
Before my form was broken; for in me
His rays resistance met. I turn'd aside
With fear of being left, when I beheld
Only before myself the ground obscur'd.
When thus my solace, turning him around,
Bespake me kindly: "Why distrustest thou?
Believ'st not I am with thee, thy sure guide?
It now is evening there, where buried lies
The body, in which I cast a shade, remov'd

To Naples from Brundisium's wall. Nor thou
Marvel, if before me no shadow fall,
More than that in the sky element
One ray obstructs not other. To endure
Torments of heat and cold extreme, like frames
That virtue hath dispos'd, which how it works
Wills not to us should be reveal'd. Insane
Who hopes, our reason may that space explore,
Which holds three persons in one substance knit.
Seek not the wherefore, race of human kind;
Could ye have seen the whole, no need had been
For Mary to bring forth. Moreover ye
Have seen such men desiring fruitlessly;
To whose desires repose would have been giv'n,
That now but serve them for eternal grief.
I speak of Plato, and the Stagyrice,
And others many more." And then he bent
Downwards his forehead, and in troubled mood
Broke off his speech. Meanwhile we had arriv'd
Far as the mountain's foot, and there the rock
Found of so steep ascent, that nimblest steps
To climb it had been vain. The most remote
Most wild untrodden path, in all the tract
'Twixt Lerice and Turbia were to this
A ladder easy' and open of access.

"Who knows on which hand now the steep declines?"

My master said and paus'd, "so that he may
Ascend, who journeys without aid of wine?"
And while with looks directed to the ground
The meaning of the pathway he explor'd,
And I gaz'd upward round the stony height,
Of spirits, that toward us mov'd their steps,
Yet moving seem'd not, they so slow approach'd.

I thus my guide address'd: "Upraise thine eyes,
Lo that way some, of whom thou may'st obtain
Counsel, if of thyself thou find'st it not!"

Straightway he look'd, and with free speech replied:
"Let us tend thither: they but softly come.
And thou be firm in hope, my son belov'd."

Now was that people distant far in space
A thousand paces behind ours, as much
As at a throw the nervous arm could fling,
When all drew backward on the messy crags
Of the steep bank, and firmly stood unmov'd
As one who walks in doubt might stand to look.

"O spirits perfect! O already chosen!"
Virgil to them began, "by that blest peace,
Which, as I deem, is for you all prepar'd,
Instruct us where the mountain low declines,

So that attempt to mount it be not vain.

For who knows most, him loss of time most grieves.”

As sheep, that step from forth their fold, by one,

Or pairs, or three at once; meanwhile the rest

Stand fearfully, bending the eye and nose

To ground, and what the foremost does, that do

The others, gath’ring round her, if she stops,

Simple and quiet, nor the cause discern;

So saw I moving to advance the first,

Who of that fortunate crew were at the head,

Of modest mien and graceful in their gait.

When they before me had beheld the light

From my right side fall broken on the ground,

So that the shadow reach’d the cave, they stopp’d

And somewhat back retir’d: the same did all,

Who follow’d, though unweeting of the cause.

“Unask’d of you, yet freely I confess,

This is a human body which ye see.

That the sun’s light is broken on the ground,

Marvel not: but believe, that not without

Virtue deriv’d from Heaven, we to climb

Over this wall aspire.” So them bespake

My master; and that virtuous tribe rejoin’d;

“Turn, and before you there the entrance lies,”

Making a signal to us with bent hands.

Then of them one began. "Whoe'er thou art,
Who journey'st thus this way, thy visage turn,
Think if me elsewhere thou hast ever seen."

I tow'rds him turn'd, and with fix'd eye beheld.
Comely, and fair, and gentle of aspect,
He seem'd, but on one brow a gash was mark'd.

When humbly I disclaim'd to have beheld
Him ever: "Now behold!" he said, and show'd
High on his breast a wound: then smiling spake.

"I am Manfredi, grandson to the Queen
Costanza: whence I pray thee, when return'd,
To my fair daughter go, the parent glad
Of Aragonia and Sicilia's pride;
And of the truth inform her, if of me
Aught else be told. When by two mortal blows
My frame was shatter'd, I betook myself
Weeping to him, who of free will forgives.
My sins were horrible; but so wide arms
Hath goodness infinite, that it receives
All who turn to it. Had this text divine
Been of Cosenza's shepherd better scann'd,
Who then by Clement on my hunt was set,
Yet at the bridge's head my bones had lain,

Near Benevento, by the heavy mole
Protected; but the rain now drenches them,
And the wind drives, out of the kingdom's bounds,
Far as the stream of Verde, where, with lights
Extinguish'd, he remov'd them from their bed.
Yet by their curse we are not so destroy'd,
But that the eternal love may turn, while hope
Retains her verdant blossoms. True it is,
That such one as in contumacy dies
Against the holy church, though he repent,
Must wander thirty-fold for all the time
In his presumption past; if such decree
Be not by prayers of good men shorter made
Look therefore if thou canst advance my bliss;
Revealing to my good Costanza, how
Thou hast beheld me, and beside the terms
Laid on me of that interdict; for here
By means of those below much profit comes."