

“Say who is he around our mountain winds,
Or ever death has prun’d his wing for flight,
That opes his eyes and covers them at will?”

“I know not who he is, but know thus much
He comes not singly. Do thou ask of him,
For thou art nearer to him, and take heed
Accost him gently, so that he may speak.”

Thus on the right two Spirits bending each
Toward the other, talk’d of me, then both
Addressing me, their faces backward lean’d,
And thus the one began: “O soul, who yet
Pent in the body, tenderest towards the sky!
For charity, we pray thee’ comfort us,
Recounting whence thou com’st, and who thou art:
For thou dost make us at the favour shown thee
Marvel, as at a thing that ne’er hath been.”

“There stretches through the midst of Tuscany,”
I straight began: “a brooklet, whose well-head
Springs up in Falterona, with his race
Not satisfied, when he some hundred miles
Hath measur’d. From his banks bring, I this frame.
To tell you who I am were words misspent:
For yet my name scarce sounds on rumour’s lip.”

“If well I do incorp’rate with my thought
The meaning of thy speech,” said he, who first
Addrest me, “thou dost speak of Arno’s wave.”

To whom the other: “Why hath he conceal’d
The title of that river, as a man
Doth of some horrible thing?” The spirit, who
Thereof was question’d, did acquit him thus:
“I know not: but ’tis fitting well the name
Should perish of that vale; for from the source
Where teems so plenteously the Alpine steep
Maim’d of Pelorus, (that doth scarcely pass
Beyond that limit,) even to the point
Whereunto ocean is restor’d, what heaven
Drains from th’ exhaustless store for all earth’s streams,
Throughout the space is virtue worried down,
As ’twere a snake, by all, for mortal foe,
Or through disastrous influence on the place,
Or else distortion of misguided wills,
That custom goads to evil: whence in those,
The dwellers in that miserable vale,
Nature is so transform’d, it seems as they
Had shar’d of Circe’s feeding. ’Midst brute swine,
Worthier of acorns than of other food
Created for man’s use, he shapeth first
His obscure way; then, sloping onward, finds
Curs, snarlers more in spite than power, from whom

He turns with scorn aside: still journeying down,
By how much more the curst and luckless foss
Swells out to largeness, e'en so much it finds
Dogs turning into wolves. Descending still
Through yet more hollow eddies, next he meets
A race of foxes, so replete with craft,
They do not fear that skill can master it.
Nor will I cease because my words are heard
By other ears than thine. It shall be well
For this man, if he keep in memory
What from no erring Spirit I reveal.
Lo! I behold thy grandson, that becomes
A hunter of those wolves, upon the shore
Of the fierce stream, and cows them all with dread:
Their flesh yet living sets he up to sale,
Then like an aged beast to slaughter dooms.
Many of life he reaves, himself of worth
And goodly estimation. Smear'd with gore
Mark how he issues from the rueful wood,
Leaving such havoc, that in thousand years
It spreads not to prime lustihood again."

As one, who tidings hears of woe to come,
Changes his looks perturb'd, from whate'er part
The peril grasp him, so beheld I change
That spirit, who had turn'd to listen, struck
With sadness, soon as he had caught the word.

His visage and the other's speech did raise
Desire in me to know the names of both,
whereof with meek entreaty I inquir'd.

The shade, who late addrest me, thus resum'd:

"Thy wish imports that I vouchsafe to do
For thy sake what thou wilt not do for mine.
But since God's will is that so largely shine
His grace in thee, I will be liberal too.

Guido of Duca know then that I am.

Envy so parch'd my blood, that had I seen
A fellow man made joyous, thou hadst mark'd
A livid paleness overspread my cheek.
Such harvest reap I of the seed I sow'd.
O man, why place thy heart where there doth need
Exclusion of participants in good?

This is Rinieri's spirit, this the boast
And honour of the house of Calboli,
Where of his worth no heritage remains.
Nor his the only blood, that hath been stript
('twixt Po, the mount, the Reno, and the shore,)
Of all that truth or fancy asks for bliss;
But in those limits such a growth has sprung
Of rank and venom'd roots, as long would mock
Slow culture's toil. Where is good Lizio? where
Manardi, Traversalo, and Carpigna?

O bastard slips of old Romagna's line!
When in Bologna the low artisan,
And in Faenza yon Bernardin sprouts,
A gentle cyon from ignoble stem.
Wonder not, Tuscan, if thou see me weep,
When I recall to mind those once lov'd names,
Guido of Prata, and of Azzo him
That dwelt with you; Tignoso and his troop,
With Traversaro's house and Anastagio's,
(Each race disherited) and beside these,
The ladies and the knights, the toils and ease,
That witch'd us into love and courtesy;
Where now such malice reigns in recreant hearts.
O Brettinoro! wherefore tarriest still,
Since forth of thee thy family hath gone,
And many, hating evil, join'd their steps?
Well doeth he, that bids his lineage cease,
Bagnacavallo; Castracaro ill,
And Conio worse, who care to propagate
A race of Counties from such blood as theirs.
Well shall ye also do, Pagani, then
When from amongst you tries your demon child.
Not so, howe'er, that henceforth there remain
True proof of what ye were. O Hugolin!
Thou sprung of Fantolini's line! thy name
Is safe, since none is look'd for after thee
To cloud its lustre, warping from thy stock.

But, Tuscan, go thy ways; for now I take
Far more delight in weeping than in words.
Such pity for your sakes hath wrung my heart.”

We knew those gentle spirits at parting heard
Our steps. Their silence therefore of our way
Assur’d us. Soon as we had quitted them,
Advancing onward, lo! a voice that seem’d
Like vollied light’ning, when it rives the air,
Met us, and shouted, “Whosoever finds
Will slay me,” then fled from us, as the bolt
Lanc’d sudden from a downward-rushing cloud.
When it had giv’n short truce unto our hearing,
Behold the other with a crash as loud
As the quick-following thunder: “Mark in me
Aglauros turn’d to rock.” I at the sound
Retreating drew more closely to my guide.

Now in mute stillness rested all the air:
And thus he spake: “There was the galling bit.
But your old enemy so baits his hook,
He drags you eager to him. Hence nor curb
Avails you, nor reclaiming call. Heav’n calls
And round about you wheeling courts your gaze
With everlasting beauties. Yet your eye
Turns with fond doting still upon the earth.
Therefore He smites you who discerneth all.”