

O slight respect of man's nobility!
I never shall account it marvelous,
That our infirm affection here below
Thou mov'st to boasting, when I could not choose,
E'en in that region of unwarp'd desire,
In heav'n itself, but make my vaunt in thee!
Yet cloak thou art soon shorten'd, for that time,
Unless thou be eked out from day to day,
Goes round thee with his shears. Resuming then
With greeting such, as Rome, was first to bear,
But since hath disaccustom'd I began;
And Beatrice, that a little space
Was sever'd, smil'd reminding me of her,
Whose cough embolden'd (as the story holds)
To first offence the doubting Guenever.

"You are my sire," said I, "you give me heart
Freely to speak my thought: above myself
You raise me. Through so many streams with joy
My soul is fill'd, that gladness wells from it;
So that it bears the mighty tide, and bursts not
Say then, my honour'd stem! what ancestors
Where those you sprang from, and what years were mark'd
In your first childhood? Tell me of the fold,
That hath Saint John for guardian, what was then
Its state, and who in it were highest seated?"

As embers, at the breathing of the wind,
Their flame enliven, so that light I saw
Shine at my blandishments; and, as it grew
More fair to look on, so with voice more sweet,
Yet not in this our modern phrase, forthwith
It answer'd: "From the day, when it was said
'Hail Virgin!' to the throes, by which my mother,
Who now is sainted, lighten'd her of me
Whom she was heavy with, this fire had come,
Five hundred fifty times and thrice, its beams
To reillumine underneath the foot
Of its own lion. They, of whom I sprang,
And I, had there our birth-place, where the last
Partition of our city first is reach'd
By him, that runs her annual game. Thus much
Suffice of my forefathers: who they were,
And whence they hither came, more honourable
It is to pass in silence than to tell.
All those, who in that time were there from Mars
Until the Baptist, fit to carry arms,
Were but the fifth of them this day alive.
But then the citizen's blood, that now is mix'd
From Campi and Certaldo and Fighine,
Ran purely through the last mechanic's veins.
O how much better were it, that these people
Were neighbours to you, and that at Galluzzo
And at Trespiano, ye should have your bound'ry,

Than to have them within, and bear the stench
Of Aguglione's hind, and Signa's, him,
That hath his eye already keen for bart'ring!
Had not the people, which of all the world
Degenerates most, been stepdame unto Caesar,
But, as a mother, gracious to her son;
Such one, as hath become a Florentine,
And trades and traffics, had been turn'd adrift
To Simifonte, where his grandsire ply'd
The beggar's craft. The Conti were possess'd
Of Montemurlo still: the Cerchi still
Were in Acone's parish; nor had haply
From Valdigrieve past the Buondelmonte.
The city's malady hath ever source
In the confusion of its persons, as
The body's, in variety of food:
And the blind bull falls with a steeper plunge,
Than the blind lamb; and oftentimes one sword
Doth more and better execution,
Than five. Mark Luni, Urbisaglia mark,
How they are gone, and after them how go
Chiusi and Sinigaglia; and 't will seem
No longer new or strange to thee to hear,
That families fail, when cities have their end.
All things, that appertain t' ye, like yourselves,
Are mortal: but mortality in some
Ye mark not, they endure so long, and you

Pass by so suddenly. And as the moon
Doth, by the rolling of her heav'nly sphere,
Hide and reveal the strand unceasingly;
So fortune deals with Florence. Hence admire not
At what of them I tell thee, whose renown
Time covers, the first Florentines. I saw
The Ughi, Catilini and Filippi,
The Alberichi, Greci and Ormanni,
Now in their wane, illustrious citizens:
And great as ancient, of Sannella him,
With him of Arca saw, and Soldanieri
And Ardinghi, and Bostichi. At the poop,
That now is laden with new felony,
So cumb'rous it may speedily sink the bark,
The Ravignani sat, of whom is sprung
The County Guido, and whoso hath since
His title from the fam'd Bellincione ta'en.
Fair governance was yet an art well priz'd
By him of Pressa: Galigaio show'd
The gilded hilt and pommel, in his house.
The column, cloth'd with verrey, still was seen
Unshaken: the Sacchetti still were great,
Giouchi, Sifanti, Galli and Barucci,
With them who blush to hear the bushel nam'd.
Of the Calfucci still the branchy trunk
Was in its strength: and to the curule chairs
Sizii and Arigucci yet were drawn.

How mighty them I saw, whom since their pride
Hath undone! and in all her goodly deeds
Florence was by the bullets of bright gold
O'erflourish'd. Such the sires of those, who now,
As surely as your church is vacant, flock
Into her consistory, and at leisure
There stall them and grow fat. The o'erweening brood,
That plays the dragon after him that flees,
But unto such, as turn and show the tooth,
Ay or the purse, is gentle as a lamb,
Was on its rise, but yet so slight esteem'd,
That Ubertino of Donati grudg'd
His father-in-law should yoke him to its tribe.
Already Caponsacco had descended
Into the mart from Fesole: and Giuda
And Infangato were good citizens.
A thing incredible I tell, tho' true:
The gateway, named from those of Pera, led
Into the narrow circuit of your walls.
Each one, who bears the sightly quarterings
Of the great Baron (he whose name and worth
The festival of Thomas still revives)
His knighthood and his privilege retain'd;
Albeit one, who borders them With gold,
This day is mingled with the common herd.
In Borgo yet the Gualterotti dwelt,
And Importuni: well for its repose

Had it still lack'd of newer neighbourhood.
The house, from whence your tears have had their spring,
Through the just anger that hath murder'd ye
And put a period to your gladsome days,
Was honour'd, it, and those consorted with it.
O Buondelmonte! what ill counseling
Prevail'd on thee to break the plighted bond
Many, who now are weeping, would rejoice,
Had God to Ema giv'n thee, the first time
Thou near our city cam'st. But so was doom'd:
On that maim'd stone set up to guard the bridge,
At thy last peace, the victim, Florence! fell.
With these and others like to them, I saw
Florence in such assur'd tranquility,
She had no cause at which to grieve: with these
Saw her so glorious and so just, that ne'er
The lily from the lance had hung reverse,
Or through division been with vermeil dyed."