

Ascends: 'Declare, O Crassus!¹ for thou know'st,
The flavour of thy gold.' The voice of each
Now high, now low, as each his impulse prompts,
Is led through many a pitch, acute or grave.
Therefore, not singly, I erewhile rehearsed
That blessedness we tell of in the day:
But near me, none, beside, his accent raised."

From him we now had parted, and essay'd
With utmost efforts to surmount the way;
When I did feel, as nodding to its fall,
The mountain tremble; whence an icy chill
Seized on me, as on one to death convey'd.
So shook not Delos, when Latona there
Couch'd to bring forth the twin-born eyes of heaven.

Forthwith from every side a shout arose
So vehement, that suddenly my guide
Drew near, and cried: "Doubt not, while I conduct thee."
"Glory!" all shouted (such the sounds mine ear
Gather'd from those, who near me swell'd the sounds),
"Glory in the highest be to God." We stood
Immovably suspended, like to those,
The shepherds, who first heard in Bethlehem's field
That song: till ceased the trembling, and the song
Was ended: then our hallow'd path resumed,
Eying the prostrate shadows, who renew'd
Their custom'd mourning. Never in my breast
Did ignorance so struggle with desire
Of knowledge, if my memory do not err,
As in that moment; nor through haste dared I
To question, nor myself could aught discern.
So on I fared, in thoughtfulness and dread.

¹ *Crassus*.—Marcus Crassus, who fell miserably in the Parthian war. See Appian, "Parthica."

"E vidi Ciro più di sangue avaro,

Che Crasso d'oro, e l'uno e l'altro n'ebbe
Tanto, che parve a ciascheduno amaro."

Petrarca.

CANTO XXI.

ARGUMENT.

The two Poets are overtaken by the spirit of Statius, who, being cleansed, is on his way to Paradise, and who explains the cause of the mountain shaking, and of the hymn; his joy at beholding Virgil.

THE natural thirst, ne'er quench'd but from the well¹

Whereof the woman of Samaria craved
Excited; haste, along the cumber'd path,
After my guide, impell'd; and pity moved
My bosom for the 'vengeful doom though just.
When lo! even as Luke² relates, that Christ
Appear'd unto the two upon their way,
New-risen from his vaulted grave; to us
A shade appear'd, and after us approach'd,
Contemplating the crowd beneath its feet.
We were not ware of it; so first it spake,
Saying, "God give you peace, my brethren!" then
Sudden we turn'd: and Virgil such salute,
As fitted that kind greeting, gave; and cried:
"Peace in the blessed council be thy lot,
Awarded by that righteous court which me
To everlasting banishment exiles."

"How!" he exclaim'd, nor from his speed meanwhile
Desisting;³ "If that ye be spirits whom God
Vouchsafes not room above; who up the height
Has been thus far your guide?" To whom the bard:

¹ *The well*.—"The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not."—John iv. 15.

² *Luke*.—Chapter xxiv. 13.

³ *Nor from his speed meanwhile desisting*.—The unintelligible reading of almost all the editions here

(but not of all, as Lombardi would lead us to suppose, except his favourite Nidobeatina) is

"E perchè andate forte?"

Vellutello has also that which is no doubt the right:

"E parte andava forte."

"If thou observe the tokens,¹ which this man,
Traced by the finger of the angel, bears;
'Tis plain that in the kingdom of the just
He needs must share. But sithence she,² whose wheel
Spins day and night, for him not yet had drawn
That yarn, which on the fatal distaff piled,
Clotho apportions to each wight that breathes;
His soul, that sister is to mine and thine,
Not of herself could mount; for not like ours
Her ken: whence I, from forth the ample gulf
Of hell, was ta'en, to lead him, and will lead
Far as my lore avails. But, if thou know,
Instruct us for what cause, the mount erewhile
Thus shook, and trembled: wherefore all at once
Seem'd shouting, even from his wave-wash'd foot."

That questioning so tallied with my wish,
The thirst did feel abatement of its edge
E'en from expectance. He forthwith replied:
"In its devotion, nought irregular
This mount can witness, or by punctual rule
Unsanction'd; here from every change exempt,
Other than that, which heaven in itself
Doth of itself receive,³ no influence
Can reach us. Tempest none, shower, hail, or snow,
Hoar frost, or dewy moistness, higher falls
Than that brief scale of threefold steps: thick clouds,
Nor scudding rack, are ever seen: swift glance
Ne'er lightens; nor Thaumantian⁴ Iris gleams,
That yonder often shifts on each side heaven.

¹ *The tokens.*—The letter P for Peccata, sins, inscribed upon his forehead by the Angel, in order to his being cleared of them in his passage through Purgatory to Paradise.

² *She.*—Lachesis, one of the three fates.

³ *That which heaven in itself doth of itself receive.*—Venturi, I think rightly, interprets this to be light.

⁴ *Thaumantian.*—Figlia di Taumante.

Θάυμανος θυάνη.—*Hesiod, Theogony*, 780.
Compare Plato, "Theæt." v. ii., p. 76, Bip. edit.;
Virgil, "Æneid," ix. 5: and Spenser, "Faery
Queen," b. v., c. iii., st. 25.

"Fair is Thaumantias in her crystal gown."

Drummond.

Vapour adust doth never mount above
The highest of the trinal stairs, whereon
Peter's vicegerent stands. Lower perchance,
With various motion rock'd, trembles the soil:
But here, through wind in earth's deep hollow pent,
I know not how, yet never trembled: then
Trembles, when any spirit feels itself
So purified, that it may rise, or move
For rising; and such loud acclaim ensues.
Purification, by the will alone,
Is proved, that free to change society
Seizes the soul rejoicing in her will.
Desire of bliss is present from the first;
But strong propension hinders, to that wish¹
By the just ordinance of heaven opposed;
Propension now as eager to fulfil
The allotted torment, as erewhile to sin.
And I, who in this punishment had lain
Five hundred years and more, but now have felt
Free wish for happier clime. Therefore thou felt'st
The mountain tremble; and the spirits devout
Heard'st, over all his limits, utter praise
To that liege Lord, whom I entreat their joy
To hasten." Thus he spake: and, since the draught
Is grateful ever as the thirst is keen,
No words may speak my fulness of content.

"Now," said the instructor sage, "I see the net²
That takes ye here: and how the toils are loosed;
Why rocks the mountain, and why ye rejoice.
Vouchsafe, that from thy lips I next may learn

¹ *To that wish.*—Lombardi here alters the sense by reading with the Nidobeatina, "con tal voglia," instead of "contra voglia," and explains it: "With the same ineffectual will with which man was contrary to sin while he resolved on sinning, even with the same, would he wish to rise from his torment

in Purgatory, at the same time that through inclination to satisfy the divine justice he yet remains there."

² *I see the net.*—"I perceive that ye are detained here by your wish to satisfy the divine justice."

Who on the earth thou wast; and wherefore here,
 So many an age, were prostrate."—"In that time,
 When the good Titus,¹ with Heaven's King to help,
 Avenged those piteous gashes, whence the blood
 By Judas sold did issue; with the name²
 Most lasting and most honour'd, there, was I
 Abundantly renown'd," the shade replied,
 "Not yet with faith endued. So passing sweet
 My vocal spirit; from Tolosa,³ Rome
 To herself drew me, where I merited
 A myrtle garland⁴ to inwreath my brow.
 Statius they name me still. Of Thebes I sang,
 And next of great Achilles; but if the way
 Fell⁵ with the second burthen. Of my flame
 Those sparkles were the seeds, which I derived
 From the bright fountain of celestial fire
 That feeds unnumber'd lamps; the song I mean
 Which sounds Æneas' wanderings: that the breast
 I hung at; that the nurse, from whom my veins
 Drank inspiration; whose authority
 Was ever sacred with me. To have lived
 Co-eval with the Mantuan, I would bide
 The revolution of another sun
 Beyond my stated years in banishment."
 The Mantuan, when he heard him, turn'd to me;
 And holding silence, by his countenance

¹ *When the good Titus.*—When it was so ordered by the divine Providence that Titus, by the destruction of Jerusalem, should avenge the death of our Saviour on the Jews.

² *The name.*—The name of poet.

³ *From Tolosa.*—Dante, as many others have done, confounds Statius the poet, who was a Neapolitan, with a rhetorician of the same name, who was of Tolosa, or Thoulouse. Thus Chaucer, "Temple of Fame," b. iii.:

"The Tholason, that height Stace."
 And Boccaccio, as cited by Lombardi:

"E Stazio di Tolosa ancora caro."

Amorosa Visio, cant. 5.

⁴ *A myrtle garland.*—

"Et vos, O lauri, carpam, et te, proxima myrte."

Virgil, *Ecl.* ii.

"Qual vaghezza di lauro? o qual di mirto?"

Petrarca.

"Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more,
 Ye myrtles brown."

Milton, *Lycidas.*

⁵ *Fell.*—Statius lived to write only a small part of the "Achilleid."

Enjoin'd me silence: but the power, which wills,
 Bears not supreme control: laughter and tears
 Follow so closely on the passion prompts them,
 They wait not for the motions of the will
 In natures most sincere. I did but smile,
 As one who winks;¹ and thereupon the shade
 Broke off, and peer'd into mine eyes, where best
 Our looks interpret. "So to good event
 Mayst thou conduct such great emprise," he cried,
 "Say, why across thy visage beam'd, but now,
 The lightning of a smile." On either part
 Now am I straiten'd; one conjures me speak,
 The other to silence binds me: whence a sigh
 I utter, and the sigh is heard. "Speak on,"
 The teacher cried: "and do not fear to speak;
 But tell him what so earnestly he asks."
 Whereon I thus: "Perchance, O ancient spirit!
 Thou marvel'st at my smiling. There is room
 For yet more wonder. He, who guides my ken
 On high, he is that Mantuan, led by whom
 Thou didst presume of men and gods to sing.
 If other cause thou deem'dst for which I smiled,
 Leave it as not the true one: and believe
 Those words, thou spakest of him, indeed the cause."
 Now down he bent to embrace my teacher's feet;
 But he forbade him: "Brother! do it not:
 Thou art a shadow, and behold'st a shade."
 He, rising, answer'd thus: "Now hast thou proved
 The force and ardour of the love I bear thee,
 When I forget we are but things of air,
 And, as a substance, treat an empty shade."

¹ *I did but smile, as one who winks.*—"I smiled no more than one would do who wished by a smile to intimate his consciousness of anything to another person."