



And when I saw
Spirits along the flame proceeding, I
Between their footsteps and mine own was fain
To share by turns my view.

Canto XXV., lines 119-122.

CANTO XXV.

ARGUMENT.

Virgil and Statius resolve some doubts that have arisen in the mind of Dante from what he had just seen. They all arrive on the seventh and last cornice, where the sin of incontinence is purged in fire; and the spirits of those suffering therein are heard to record illustrious instances of chastity.

IT was an hour, when he who climbs, had need
To walk uncrippled: for the sun¹ had now
To Taurus the meridian circle left,
And to the Scorpion left the night. As one,
That makes no pause, but presses on his road,
Whate'er betide him, if some urgent need
Impel; so enter'd we² upon our way,
One before other; for, but singly, none
That steep and narrow scale admits to climb.

E'en as the young stork lifeth up his wing
Through wish to fly, yet ventures not to quit
The nest, and drops it; so in me desire
Of questioning my guide arose, and fell,
Arriving even to the act that marks
A man prepared for speech. Him all our haste
Restrain'd not; but thus spake the sire beloved:
"Fear not to speed the shaft,³ that on thy lip

¹ *The sun.*—The sun had passed the meridian two hours, and that meridian was now occupied by the constellation of Taurus, to which, as the Scorpion is opposite, the latter constellation was consequently at the meridian of night.

² *So enter'd we.*—

"Davanti a me andava la mia guida:
E poi io dietro per una via stretta
Seguendo lei come mia scorta fida."

Frezzi, Il Quadriregio, lib. ii., cap. 3.

The good prelate of Foligno has followed our poet so closely throughout this *Capitolo*, that it would be necessary to transcribe almost the whole of it in

order to show how much he has copied. These verses of his own may well be applied to him on the occasion.

³ *Fear not to speed the shaft.*—"Fear not to utter the words that are already at the tip of thy tongue."

Πολλὰ μὲν ἀρτιεπὴς
Γλώσσα μοι τοξόημα³ ἔχει περὶ κείνων
Κελαδῶραι.

Pindar, Isthm., v. 60.

"Full many a shaft of sounding rhyme
Stands trembling on my lip
Their glory to declare."

Stands trembling for its flight." Encouraged thus,
I straight began: "How there can leanness come,¹
Where is no want of nourishment to feed?"

"If thou," he answer'd, "hadst remember'd thee,
How Meleager² with the wasting brand
Wasted alike, by equal fires consumed;
This would not trouble thee: and hadst thou thought,
How in the mirror³ your reflected form
With mimic motion vibrates; what now seems
Hard, had appear'd no harder than the pulp
Of summer-fruit mature. But that thy will
In certainty may find its full repose,
Lo Statius here! on him I call, and pray
That he would now be healer of thy wound."

"If, in thy presence, I unfold to him
The secrets of Heaven's vengeance, let me plead
Thine own injunction to exculpate me."
So Statius answer'd, and forthwith began:
"Attend my words, O son, and in thy mind
Receive them; so shall they be light to clear
The doubt thou offer'st. Blood, concocted well,
Which by the thirsty veins is ne'er imbibed,
And rests as food superfluous, to be ta'en
From the replenish'd table, in the heart
Derives effectual virtue, that informs
The several human limbs, as being that
Which passes through the veins itself to make them.
Yet more concocted it descends, where shame

¹ *How there can leanness come.*—"How can spirits, that need not corporeal nourishment, be subject to leanness?" This question gives rise to the following explanation of Statius respecting the formation of the human body from the first, its junction with the soul, and the passage of the latter to another world.

² *Meleager.*—Virgil reminds Dante that, as Meleager was wasted away by the decree of the fates, and

not through want of blood, so, by the divine appointment, there may be leanness where there is no need of nourishment.

³ *In the mirror.*—As the reflection of a form in a mirror is modified in agreement with the modification of the form itself, so the soul, separated from the earthly body, impresses the image or ghost of that body with its own affections.

Forbids to mention: and from thence distils
In natural vessels on another's blood.
There each unite together; one disposed
To endure, to act the other, through that power
Derived from whence it came;¹ and being met
It 'gins to work, coagulating first;
Then vivifies what its own substance made
Consist. With animation now endued,
The active virtue (differing from a plant
No further, than that this is on the way,
And at its limit that) continues yet
To operate, that now it moves, and feels,
As sea-sponge² clinging to the rock: and there
Assumes the organic powers its seed convey'd.
This is the moment, son! at which the virtue,
That from the generating heart proceeds,
Is pliant and expansive; for each limb
Is in the heart by forgeful nature plann'd.
How babe³ of animal becomes, remains
For thy considering. At this point, more wise,
Than thou, has err'd,⁴ making the soul disjoin'd
From passive intellect, because he saw
No organ for the latter's use assign'd.

"Open thy bosom to the truth that comes.
Know, soon as in the embryo, to the brain
Articulation is complete, then turns
The primal Mover with a smile of joy
On such great work of nature; and imbreathes

¹ *From whence it came.*—"From the heart," as Lombardi rightly interprets it.

² *As sea-sponge.*—The fœtus is in this stage a zoöphyte.

³ *Babe.*—By "fante," which is here rendered "babe," is meant "the human creature." "The creature that is distinguished from others by its faculty of speech," just as Homer calls men—

γενεαὶ μέρπων ἀνθρώπων.

⁴ *More wise, than thou, has err'd.*—Averroes is said to be here meant. Venturi refers to his commentary on Aristotle, "De Anim.," lib. iii., cap. 5, for the opinion that there is only one universal intellect or mind pervading every individual of the human race. Much of the knowledge displayed by our poet in the present canto appears to have been derived from the medical work of Averroes called the "Colliget," lib. ii., f. 10, Ven., 1490, fol.