



In childhood, thrill'd me, than towards Virgil I  
Turn'd me to leftward; panting, like a babe,  
That flees for refuge to his mother's breast,  
If aught have terrified or work'd him woe:  
And would have cried, "There is no dram of blood,  
That doth not quiver in me. The old flame<sup>1</sup>  
Throws out clear tokens of reviving fire."  
But Virgil had bereaved us of himself;  
Virgil, my best-loved father; Virgil, he  
To whom I gave me up for safety: nor<sup>2</sup>  
All, our prime mother lost, avail'd to save  
My undew'd cheeks from blur of soiling tears.

"Dante! weep not that Virgil leaves thee; nay  
Weep thou not yet: behoves thee feel the edge  
Of other sword; and thou shalt weep for that."

As to the prow or stern, some admiral  
Paces the deck, inspiriting his crew,  
When 'mid the sail-yards all hands ply aloof;  
Thus, on the left side of the car, I saw  
(Turning me at the sound of mine own name,  
Which here I am compell'd to register)  
The virgin station'd, who before appear'd  
Veil'd in that festive shower angelical.

Towards me, across the stream, she bent her eyes;  
Though from her brow the veil descending, bound  
With foliage of Minerva, suffer'd not  
That I beheld her clearly: then with act  
Full royal, still insulting o'er her thrall,  
Added, as one who, speaking, keepeth back  
The bitterest saying, to conclude the speech:  
"Observe me well. I am, in sooth, I am

<sup>1</sup> The old flame.—

"Agnosco veteris vestigia flammae."

*Virgil, Æneid, lib. iv. 23.*

"Conosco i segni dell' antico fuoco."

*Giusto de' Conti, La Bella Mano.*

<sup>2</sup> Nor.—"Not all the beauties of the terrestrial  
Paradise, in which I was, were sufficient to allay my  
grief."



Beatrice. What! and hast thou deign'd at last  
 Approach the mountain? Knewest not, O man!  
 Thy happiness is here?" Down fell mine eyes  
 On the clear fount; but there, myself espying,  
 Recoil'd, and sought the greensword; such a weight  
 Of shame was on my forehead. With a mien  
 Of that stern majesty, which doth surround  
 A mother's presence to her awe-struck child,  
 She look'd; a flavour of such bitterness  
 Was mingled in her pity. There her words  
 Brake off; and suddenly the angels sang,  
 "In thee, O gracious Lord! my hope hath been:"  
 But ' went no further than, "Thou, Lord! hast set  
 My feet in ample room." As snow, that lies,  
 Amidst the living rafters<sup>2</sup> on the back  
 Of Italy, congeal'd, when drifted high  
 And closely piled by rough Slavonian blasts;  
 Breathe but the land whereon no shadow falls  
 And straightway melting it distils away,  
 Like a fire-wasted taper: thus was I,  
 Without a sigh or tear, or ever these  
 Did sing, that, with the chiming of heaven's sphere,  
 Still in their warbling chime: but when the strain  
 Of dulcet symphony express'd for me  
 Their soft compassion, more than could the words,  
 "Virgin! why so consumest him?" then, the ice,<sup>4</sup>  
 Congeal'd about my bosom, turn'd itself

<sup>1</sup> But.—They sang the thirty-first Psalm, to the end of the eighth verse. What follows in that Psalm would not have suited the place or the occasion.

<sup>2</sup> The living rafters.—"Vive travi." The leafless woods on the Apennine.

"Fraxineæque trabes."

Virgil, *Æneid*, lib. vi. 181.

and—

"Trabibusque obscuris acernis."

*Ibid.*, lib. ix. 87.

<sup>3</sup> The land whereon no shadow falls.—"When the wind blows from off Africa, where, at the time of the equinox, bodies, being under the equator, cast little or no shadow; or, in other words, when the wind is south."

<sup>4</sup> The ice.—Milton has transferred this conceit, though scarcely worth the pains of removing, into one of his Italian poems, Son. v.

To spirit and water; and with anguish forth  
 Gush'd, through the lips and eyelids, from the heart.  
 Upon the chariot's same edge<sup>1</sup> still she stood,  
 Immovable; and thus address'd her words  
 To those bright semblances with pity touch'd:  
 "Ye in the eternal day your vigils keep;  
 So that nor night nor slumber, with close stealth,  
 Conveys from you a single step, in all  
 The goings on of time: thence, with more heed  
 I shape mine answer, for his ear intended,  
 Who there stands weeping; that the sorrow now  
 May equal the transgression. Not alone  
 Through operation of the mighty orbs,  
 That mark each seed to some predestined aim,  
 As with aspect or fortunate or ill  
 The constellations meet; but through benign  
 Largess of heavenly graces, which rain down  
 From such a height as mocks our vision, this man  
 Was, in the freshness of his being,<sup>2</sup> such,  
 So gifted virtually, that in him  
 All better habits wondrously had thrived.  
 The more of kindly strength is in the soil,  
 So much doth evil seed and lack of culture  
 Mar it the more, and make it run to wildness.  
 These looks sometime upheld him; for I show'd  
 My youthful eyes, and led him by their light  
 In upright walking. Soon as I had reach'd  
 The threshold of my second age,<sup>3</sup> and changed  
 My mortal for immortal; then he left me,

<sup>1</sup> Same edge.—The Nidobeatina edition, and many MSS., here read "*detta coscia*," instead of "*destra*," or "*dritta coscia*;" and it is probable from what has gone before, that the former is the right reading. See v. 60.

<sup>2</sup> In the freshness of his being.—"Nella sua vita

nuova." Some suppose our poet alludes to the work so called, written in his youth.

<sup>3</sup> The threshold of my second age.—In the "*Convito*," our poet makes a division of human life into four ages, the first of which lasts till the twenty-fifth year. Beatrice, therefore, passed from this life to a better about that period.



And gave himself to others. When from flesh  
 To spirit I had risen, and increase  
 Of beauty and of virtue circled me,  
 I was less dear to him, and valued less.  
 His steps were turn'd into deceitful ways,  
 Following false images of good, that make  
 No promise perfect. Nor avail'd me aught  
 To sue for inspirations, with the which,  
 I, both in dreams of night, and otherwise,  
 Did call him back; of them, so little reck'd him.  
 Such depth he fell, that all device was short  
 Of his preserving, save that he should view  
 The children of perdition. To this end  
 I visited the purlieus of the dead:  
 And one, who hath conducted him thus high,  
 Received my supplications urged with weeping.  
 It were a breaking of God's high decree,  
 If Lethe should be past, and such food<sup>1</sup> tasted,  
 Without the cost of some repentant tear."

<sup>1</sup> *If Lethe should be past, and such food.*—The oblivion of sins.

## CANTO XXXI.

### ARGUMENT.

Beatrice continues her reprehension of Dante, who confesses his error, and falls to the ground. Coming to himself again, he is by Matilda drawn through the waters of Lethe, and presented first to the four virgins who figure the cardinal virtues; these in their turn lead him to the Gryphon, a symbol of our Saviour; and the three virgins representing the evangelical virtues intercede for him with Beatrice, that she would display to him her second beauty.

"**THOU!**" her words she thus without delay  
 Resuming, turn'd their point on me, to whom  
 They, with but lateral edge,<sup>1</sup> seem'd harsh before:  
 "Say thou, who stand'st beyond the holy stream,  
 If this be true. A charge, so grievous, needs  
 Thine own avowal." On my faculty  
 Such strange amazement hung, the voice expired  
 Imperfect, ere its organs gave it birth.  
 A little space refraining, then she spake:  
 "What dost thou muse on? Answer me. The wave  
 On thy remembrances of evil yet  
 Hath done no injury." A mingled sense  
 Of fear and of confusion, from my lips  
 Did such a "Yea" produce, as needed help  
 Of vision to interpret. As when breaks,  
 In act to be discharged, a cross-bow bent  
 Beyond its pitch, both nerve and bow o'erstretch'd;  
 The flagging weapon feebly hits the mark:  
 Thus, tears and sighs forth gushing, did I burst,  
 Beneath the heavy load: and thus my voice  
 Was slacken'd on its way. She straight began:

<sup>1</sup> *To whom they, with but lateral edge.*—The words of Beatrice, when not addressed directly to himself,

but spoken to the angel of him, Dante had thought sufficiently harsh.