

I pray thee, living topaz! that ingemm'st
This precious jewel; let me hear thy name."

"I am thy root,¹ O leaf! whom to expect
Even, hath pleased me." Thus the prompt reply
Prefacing, next it added: "He, of whom²
Thy kindred appellation comes, and who,
These hundred years and more, on its first ledge
Hath circuited the mountain, was my son,
And thy great-grandsire. Well befits, his long
Endurance should be shorten'd by thy deeds.

"Florence,³ within her ancient limit-mark,
Which calls her still⁴ to matin prayers and noon,
Was chaste and sober, and abode in peace.
She had no armlets and no head-tires then;
No purpled dames; no zone, that caught the eye
More than the person did. Time was not yet,
When⁵ at his daughter's birth the sire grew pale,
For fear the age and dowry should exceed,
On each side, just proportion. House was none
Void⁶ of its family: nor yet had come
Sardanapalus,⁷ to exhibit feats
Of chamber prowess. Montemalo⁸ yet
O'er our suburban turret⁹ rose; as much

¹ *I am thy root.*—Cacciagnida, father to Alighieri, of whom our poet was the great-grandson.

² *He, of whom.*—"Thy great-grandfather, Alighieri, has been in the first round of Purgatory more than a hundred years; and it is fit that thou by thy good deserts shouldst endeavour to shorten the time of his remaining there." For what is known of Alighieri, see Pelli, "Memor. Opere di Dante," ediz. Zatta, 1758, tom. iv., P. 2da, p. 21. His son Bellincione was living in 1266; and of him was born the father of our poet, whom Benvenuto da Imola calls a lawyer by profession.—Pelli, *ibid.*

³ *Florence.*—See G. Villani, lib. iii., cap. ii.

⁴ *Which calls her still.*—The public clock being still within the circuit of the ancient walls.

⁵ *When.*—When the women were not married at too early an age, and did not expect too large a portion.

⁶ *Void.*—Through the civil wars and banishments. Or he may mean that houses were not formerly built merely for pomp and show, nor of greater size than was necessary for containing the families that inhabited them. For it has been understood in both these ways.

⁷ *Sardanapalus.*—The luxurious monarch of Assyria. Juvenal is here imitated, who uses his name for an instance of effeminacy, Sat. x. 362.

⁸ *Montemalo.*—Either an elevated spot between Rome and Viterbo, or Monte Mario, the site of the villa Mellini, commanding a view of Rome.

⁹ *Our suburban turret.*—Uccellatojo, near Florence, from whence that city was discovered. Florence had not yet vied with Rome in the grandeur of her public buildings.

To be surpass'd in fall, as in its rising.
I saw Bellincione Berti¹ walk abroad
In leathern girdle, and a clasp of bone;
And, with no artful colouring on her cheeks,
His lady leave the glass. The sons I saw
Of Nerli, and of Vecchio,² well content
With unrobed jerkin; and their good dames handling
The spindle and the flax: O happy they!
Each³ sure of burial in her native land,
And none left desolate a-bed in France.
One waked to tend the cradle, hushing it
With sounds that lull'd the parent's infancy:
Another, with her maidens, drawing off
The tresses from the distaff, lectured them
Old tales of Troy, and Fesole, and Rome.
A Salterello and Cianghella⁴ we
Had held as strange a marvel, as ye would
A Cincinnatus or Cornelia now.

"In such composed and seemly fellowship,
Such faithful and such fair equality,

¹ *Bellincione Berti.*—"Hell," canto xvi. 38, and notes. There is a curious description of the simple manner in which the earlier Florentines dressed themselves, in G. Villani, lib. vi., c. lxxi.: "And observe that in the time of the said people (A.D. 1259), and before and for a long time after, the citizens of Florence lived soberly, on coarse viands, and at little cost, and in many customs and courtesies of life were rude and unpolished; and dressed themselves and their women in coarse cloths: many wore plain leather, without cloth over it; bonnets on their heads; and all boots on the feet: and the Florentine women were without ornament; the better sort content with a close gown of scarlet cloth of Ypres or of camlet, bound with a girdle in the ancient mode, and a mantle lined with fur, and a hood to it, which was worn on the head; the common sort of women were clad in a coarse gown of Cambrai in like manner. One hundred pounds (libbre) was the common portion for a wife; and two or three hundred was accounted a magnificent one; and the young women were for the most part twenty years old or

more before they were given in marriage. Such was the dress, and thus coarse were the manners of the Florentines: but they were of good faith and loyal both among themselves and to the state, and with their coarse way of living and poverty did greater and more virtuous deeds than have been done in our times with greater refinement and wealth."

² *Of Nerli, and of Vecchio.*—Two of the most opulent families in Florence.

³ *Each.*—"None fearful either of dying in banishment, or of being deserted by her husband on a scheme of traffic in France."

⁴ *A Salterello and Cianghella.*—The latter a shameless woman of the family of Tosa, married to Lito degli Alidosi of Imola; the former Lapo Salterello, a lawyer, with whom Dante was at variance. "We should have held an abandoned character, like these, as great a wonder, as ye would the contrary now." There is a sonnet by Lapo Salterello in Corbinelli's collection printed with the "Bella Mano," ed. Firenze, 1715, p. 150.

In so sweet household, Mary¹ at my birth
Bestow'd me, call'd on with loud cries: and there,
In your old baptistery, I was made
Christian at once and Cacciagnida; as were
My brethren Eliseo and Moronto.

"From Val dipado² came to me my spouse;
And hence thy surname grew. I follow'd then
The Emperor Conrad:³ and his knighthood he
Did gird on me; in such good part he took
My valiant service. After him I went
To testify against that evil law,
Whose people,⁴ by the shepherd's fault, possess
Your right usurp'd. There I by that foul crew
Was disentangled from the treacherous world
Whose base affection many a spirit soils;
And from the martyrdom came to this peace."

¹ *Mary*.—The Virgin was invoked in the pains of child-birth. "Purgatory," canto xx. 21.

² *Val dipado*.—Cacciagnida's wife, whose family name was Alighieri, came from Ferrara, called Val di Pado, from its being watered by the Po.

³ *Conrad*.—The Emperor Conrad III., who died in 1152. See G. Villani, lib. iv. xxxiv.

⁴ *Whose people*.—The Mahometans, who were left in possession of the Holy Land, through the supineness of the Pope. See canto ix. 123.

CANTO XVI.

ARGUMENT.

Cacciagnida relates the time of his birth, and, describing the extent of Florence when he lived there, recounts the names of the chief families who then inhabited it. Its degeneracy, and subsequent disgrace, he attributes to the introduction of families from the neighbouring country and villages, and to their mixture with the primitive citizens.

O SLIGHT respect of man's nobility!
I never shall account it marvellous,
That our infirm affection here below
Thou movest to boasting; when I could not chuse,
E'en in that region of unwarp'd desire,
In heaven 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 greeting¹ such as Rome was first to bear,
But since hath disaccustom'd, I began:
And Beatrice,² that a little space
Was sever'd, smiled; reminding me of her,
Whose cough embolden'd (as the story holds)
To first offence the doubting Guenever.³

"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

¹ *With greeting*.—The poet, who had addressed the spirit, not knowing him to be his ancestor, with a plain "Thou," now uses more ceremony, and calls him "You," according to a custom introduced among the Romans in the latter times of the empire.

² *Beatrice*.—Lombardi observes, that in order to show us that his conversation with Cacciagnida had no connection with sacred subjects, Beatrice is de-

scribed as standing at a little distance; and her smiling at his formal address to his ancestor, makes him fall into a greater freedom of manner. See the next canto, v. 15.

³ *Guenever*.—Beatrice's smile reminded him of the female servant who, by her coughing, emboldened Queen Guenever to admit the freedoms of Lancelot. See "Hell," canto v. 124.