

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 Valdipado² 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 *Valdipado*.—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.

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
 Were those you sprang from, and what years were mark'd
 In your first childhood? Tell me of the fold,¹
 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,² 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 times and fourscore, to relume
 Its radiance underneath the burning foot
 Of its own lion. They, of whom I sprang,
 And I, had there our birth-place, where the last³
 Partition of our city first is reach'd

¹ *The fold*.—Florence, of which John the Baptist was the patron saint.

² *From the day*.—From the incarnation of our Lord to the birth of Cacciagnida, the planet Mars had returned five hundred and eighty times to the constellation of Leo, with which it is supposed to have a congenial influence. As Mars, then, completes his revolution in a period forty-three days short of two years, Cacciagnida was born about 1090. This is Lombardi's computation, and it squares well both with the old reading—

"Cinquecento cinquanta
 E trenta fiate,"

and with the time when Cacciagnida might have fallen fighting under Conrad III., who died in 1152. Not so the computation made by the old commentators in general, who, reckoning two years for the revolution of Mars, placed the birth of Cacciagnida in 1160; the impossibility of which being perceived by the Academicians della Crusca (as it had before been by Pietro, the son of our poet, or by the

author of the commentary which passes for his), they altered the word "trenta" into "tre," "thirty" into "three;" and so, still reckoning the revolution of Mars at two years, brought Cacciagnida's birth to 1106. The way in which Lombardi has got over the difficulty appears preferable, as it retains the old reading; and I have accordingly altered the translation, which before stood thus:

"This fire had come,
 Five hundred fifty times and thrice, its beams
 To re-illumine underneath the foot
 Of its own lion."

Since this note was written, Monti has given his assent to Lombardi's opinion. See his "Proposta," under the word "Rinfiammare," t. iii., pte. ii. 210.

³ *The last*.—The city was divided into four compartments. The Elisei, the ancestors of Dante, resided near the entrance of that, named from the Porta S. Piero, which was the last reached by the competitor in the annual race at Florence. See G. Villani, lib. iv., cap. x.

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 at that time were there, betwixt
 Mars¹ and 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,²
 Ran purely through the last mechanic's veins.
 O how much better were it, that these people³
 Were neighbours to you; and that at Galluzzo
 And at Trespiano ye should have your boundary;
 Than to have them within, and bear the stench
 Of Aguglione's hind, and Signa's,⁴ him,
 That hath his eye already keen for bartering.⁵
 Had not the people,⁶ which of all the world
 Degenerates most, been stepdame unto Cæsar,
 But, as a mother to her son been kind,
 Such one, as hath become a Florentine,
 And trades and traffics, had been turn'd adrift
 To Simifonte,⁷ where his grandsire plied
 The beggar's craft: the Conti were possess'd

¹ *Mars*.—The Padre d'Aquino understands this to refer to the population of Florence in Guido's time; for, according to him, "tra Marte e'l Batista" means the space between the statue of Mars placed on the Ponte Vecchio and the Baptistery; and Lombardi assents to this interpretation. Venturi supposes that the portion of land so described would have been insufficient to hold the population which Florence contained at the supposed date of this poem, that is, in the year 1300; and agrees with the elder commentators, who consider the description as relating to time and not to place, and as indicating the two periods of heathenism and Christianity. See canto xiii. 144. It would not be easy to determine the real sense of a passage thus equivocal.

² *Campi and Certaldo and Fighine*.—Country places near Florence.

³ *That these people*.—"That the inhabitants of the above-mentioned places had not been mixed with the citizens; nor the limits of Florence extended beyond Galluzzo and Trespiano."

⁴ *Aguglione's hind, and Signa's*.—Baldo of Aguglione, and Bonifazio of Signa.

⁵ *His eye already keen for bartering*.—See "Hell," canto xxi. 40, and note.

⁶ *Had not the people*.—If Rome had continued in her allegiance to the emperor, and the Guelph and Ghibelline factions had thus been prevented, Florence would not have been polluted by a race of upstarts, nor lost the most respectable of her ancient families.

⁷ *Simifonte*.—A castle dismantled by the Florentines. G. Villani, lib. v., cap. xxx. The person here alluded to is no longer known.