

Which bringeth thee so near: and wherefore, say,
 Doth the sweet symphony of Paradise
 Keep silence here, pervading with such sounds
 Of rapt devotion every lower sphere?"
 "Mortal art thou in hearing, as in sight;"
 Was the reply: "and what forbade the smile¹
 Of Beatrice interrupts our song.
 Only to yield thee gladness of my voice,
 And of the light that vests me, I thus far
 Descend these hallow'd steps: not that more love
 Invites me; for, lo! there aloft,² as much
 Or more of love is witness'd in those flames:
 But such my lot by charity assign'd,
 That makes us ready servants, as thou seest,
 To execute the counsel of the Highest."

"That in this court," said I, "O sacred lamp!
 Love no compulsion needs, but follows free
 The eternal Providence, I well discern:
 This harder find to deem: why, of thy peers,
 Thou only, to this office wert foredoom'd."

I had not ended, when, like rapid mill,
 Upon its centre whirl'd the light; and then
 The love that did inhabit there, replied:
 "Splendour eternal, piercing through these folds,
 Its virtue to my vision knits; and thus
 Supported, lifts me so above myself,
 That on the sovran essence, which it wells from
 I have the power to gaze: and hence the joy,
 Wherewith I sparkle, equalling with my blaze
 The keenness of my sight. But not the soul,³
 That is in heaven most lustrous, nor the seraph,
 That hath his eyes most fix'd on God, shall solve

¹ *What forbade the smile.*—"Because it would have overcome thee.

² *For, lo! there aloft.*—Where the other souls were.

³ *Not the soul.*—The particular ends of Providence being concealed from the very angels themselves.

What thou hast ask'd: for in the abyss it lies
 Of th' everlasting statute sunk so low,
 That no created ken may fathom it.
 And, to the mortal world when thou return'st,
 Be this reported: that none henceforth dare
 Direct his footsteps to so dread a bourn.
 The mind, that here is radiant, on the earth
 Is wrapt in mist. Look then if she may do
 Below, what passeth her ability
 When she is ta'en to heaven." By words like these
 Admonish'd, I the question urged no more;
 And of the spirit humbly sued alone
 To instruct me of its state. "Twixt either shore¹
 Of Italy, nor distant from thy land,
 A stony ridge² ariseth; in such sort,
 The thunder doth not lift his voice so high.
 They call it Catria:³ at whose foot, a cell
 Is sacred to the lonely Eremite;
 For worship set apart and holy rites."
 A third time thus it spake; then added: "There
 So firmly to God's service I adhered,
 That with no costlier viands than the juice
 Of olives, easily I pass'd the heats
 Of summer and the winter frosts; content
 In heaven-ward musings. Rich were the returns
 And fertile, which that cloister once was used
 To render to these heavens: now 'tis fallen
 Into a waste so empty, that ere long
 Detection must lay bare its vanity.
 Pietro Damiano⁴ there was I y-clept:

¹ *Twixt either shore*.—Between the Adriatic gulf and the Mediterranean sea.

² *A stony ridge*.—A part of the Apennine. Gibbo is literally a "hunch." Thus Archilochus calls the island of Thasus, ὄρος ῥάχης. See Gaisford's "Poetæ Minores Græci," t. i., p. 298.

³ *Catria*.—Now the abbey of Santa Croce, in the

duchy of Urbino, about half-way between Gubbio and La Pergola. Here Dante is said to have resided for some time.

⁴ *Pietro Damiano*.—"S. Pietro Damiano obtained a great and well-merited reputation, by the pains he took to correct the abuses among the clergy. Ravenna is supposed to have been the place of his birth,

Pietro the sinner, when before I dwelt,
 Beside the Adriatic,¹ in the house
 Of our blest Lady. Near upon my close
 Of mortal life, through much importuning
 I was constrained to wear the hat,² that still
 From bad to worse is shifted.—Cephas³ came;
 He came, who was the Holy Spirit's vessel;⁴
 Barefoot and lean; eating their bread, as chanced,
 At the first table. Modern Shepherds need
 Those who on either hand may prop and lead them,
 So burly are they grown; and from behind,
 Others to hoist them. Down the palfrey's sides
 Spread their broad mantles, so as both the beasts
 Are covered with one skin. O patience! thou
 That look'st on this, and dost endure so long."

I at those accents saw the splendours down
 From step to step alight, and wheel, and wax,
 Each circuiting, more beautiful. Round this⁵
 They came, and stay'd them; utter'd then a shout
 So loud, it hath no likeness here: nor I
 Wist what it spake, so deafening was the thunder.

about 1007. He was employed in several important missions, and rewarded by Stephen IX. with the dignity of cardinal and the bishopric of Ostia, to which, however, he preferred his former retreat in the monastery of Fonte Avellana, and prevailed on Alexander II. to permit him to retire thither. Yet he did not long continue in this seclusion before he was sent on other embassies. He died at Faenza in 1072. His letters throw much light on the obscure history of these times. Besides them, he has left several treatises on sacred and ecclesiastical subjects. His eloquence is worthy of a better age."—*Tiraboschi, Storia della Lett. Ital.*, tom. iii., lib. iv., cap. ii. He is mentioned by Petrarch, "De Vita Solit." lib. i., sec. iii., cap. xvii.: "Siquidem statum illum, pompasque sæculi suis contribulibus linquens ipse Italiae medio, ad sinistram Apennini latus, quietissimam solitudinem, de qua multa conscripsit, et quæ vetus adhuc fontis Avellanæ nomen servat, perituris honoribus preferendam duxit, ubi non minus gloriose postmodum latuit quam innotuerat primum

Romæ, nec dedecori illi fuit alti verticis rutilum decus squalenti cilicio permutasse."—*Petrarchæ Opera, Basil.*, 1571, p. 266.

¹ *Beside the Adriatic*.—Some editions and manuscripts have "fu," instead of "fui." According to the former of these readings, S. Pietro Damiano is made to distinguish himself from S. Pietro degli Onesti, surnamed "Il Peccator," founder of the monastery of S. Maria del Porto, on the Adriatic coast, near Ravenna, who died 1119, at about eighty years of age. If it could be ascertained that there was no religious house dedicated to the blessed Virgin before that founded by Pietro degli Onesti, to which the other Pietro might have belonged, this reading would, no doubt, be preferable; but at present it seems very uncertain which is the right.

² *The hat*.—The cardinal's hat.

³ *Cephas*.—St. Peter.

⁴ *The Holy Spirit's vessel*.—St. Paul. See "Hell," canto ii. 30.

⁵ *Round this*.—Round the spirit of Pietro Damiano.