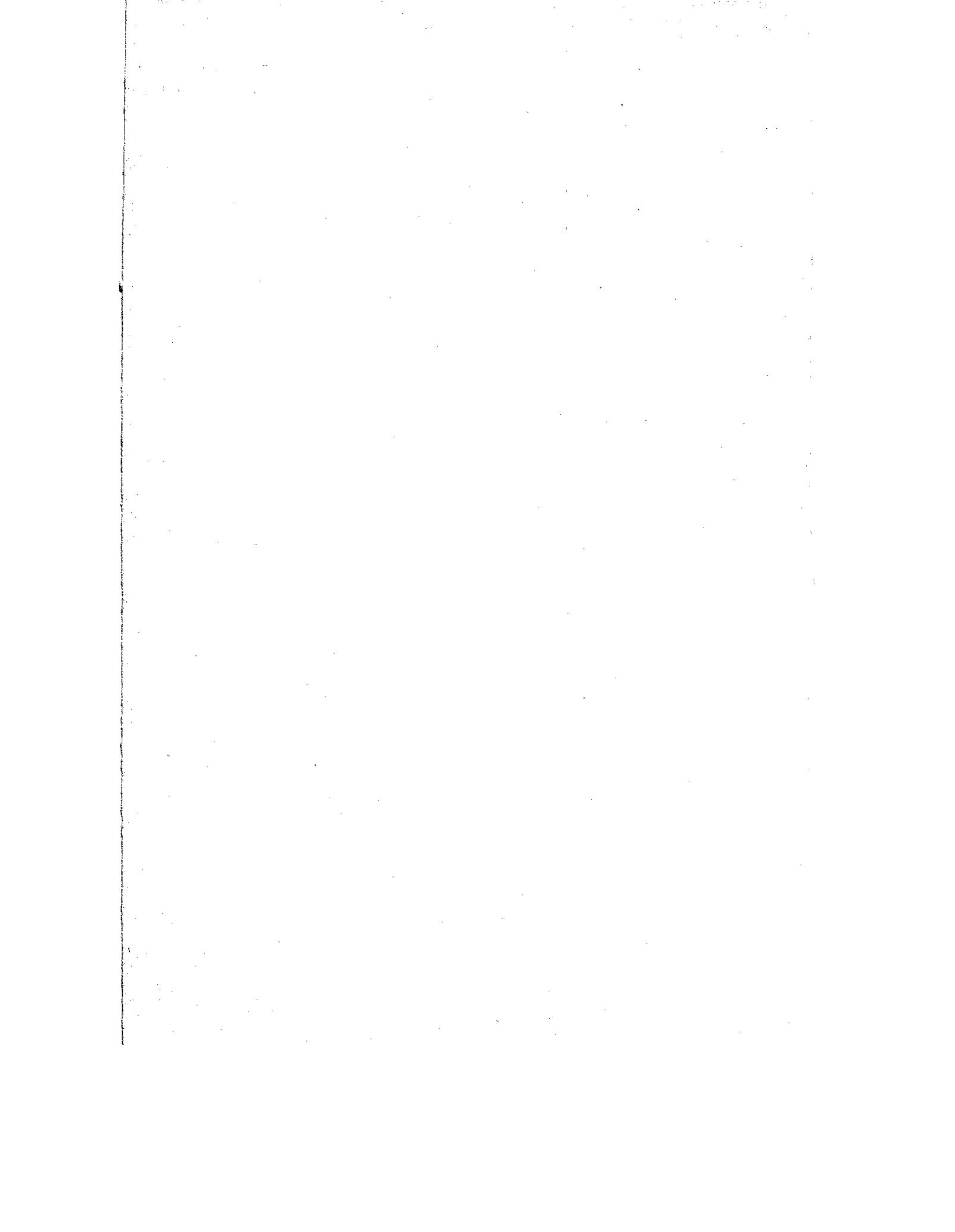


PART III
ENZIO'S KINGDOM, AND OTHER POEMS

IV
ENZIO'S KINGDOM



ENZIO'S KINGDOM

Dead, then, the most imperial of emperors
And by some accident of flesh my father!
I am content, Berard; nay, I am glad.
Life's infamy was overgalling to him.
He suffered like a god that had no part
In its creation, but was resolved — how madly —
To make it over, if not beautiful,
Tolerable at least and roomed for men.
And then, Berard, his godlike loneliness
With only you and me to lean upon!
I but a gold-haired bastard lad and you
An old man sworn to serve the Church he loathed,
Forsworn for love of him; and both of us
Brimmed and surbrimmed by his enormous dreams
And alchemized in his fond fiery love —
But of ourselves unmeriting and common.
How could all nature not rise up and be
His partisan? How could he fail, Berard,
Unless the very dastard race of men
He suffered for deserve its doom of failure?

But I forget the laws of courtesy,
Remembered first, and last forgot by him.
The night is late and you have travelled far
And secretly to tell me of his death.
I should say words of thanks and let you go.
Your hand shakes and you have great need of sleep —

We both have need of sleep, I think — long sleep.
But O, Berard, when that door clangs behind you
It will not ever open on a friend;
And I, the young king of Sardinia,
The emperor's son, will be a tame pet prisoner
Till the end, till the long sleep we need so.
Sit down, I pray you: let me talk of him —
Of him they call the Second Frederick,
But I call father. Tears — ah! And in your eyes.
How many times I've wept so at your knee!

You knew him from his birth, as you knew me,
For which I have it in my heart to envy you.
I've often wondered of that little boy
With red wild hair and sultry shadowed eyes,
Orphaned and penniless, the old Pope's ward,
An unwished, scanted guest from house to house
Among the ignorant burghers of Palermo —
Despite which the incorrigible heir
Of Barbarossa's and blond Guiscard's blood.
Those years of vile neglect and unjust anguish
Were often in his eyes, when fixed on me,
And made, I think, the passionate tenderness
Of his solicitude and vigilant love.
I was to be all he had never been —
The darling citizen of his new world;
Delight's own bosom friend; above all, free.
Now he is dead, his rosy world salt red,
And I the citizen of four wet walls,
Of freedom and of father both bereft!
If he had been content to merely be

The Kingdom's king, the lord of Sicily:
If when great Barbarossa's heavy crown
Was tendered to his brows uncrowned with manhood
He had refused it, had not dashed with you
And that gay handful of adventurers
To Constance, crashed the gates to, laughed at Otho —
Today he might be hawking in the Kingdom,
Or matching rhymes with young-voiced troubadours,
Or naming stars with some lean Arab seer:
And I'd be hearing still his great clean laugh.
But then he had been an oblivion's king,
Not Frederick, the Wonder of the World,
The Torch shook out one great amazed short instant,
Then dashed, to leave for us intenser dark. . . .

Within this nothingness ahead, I'll try
Forgetting of the smoky latter years,
The blood spilled and the failure, and solace me
With dreaming of his dream when it was true —
At least it seemed so once in our Palermo.
'Tis not the rich deceptive blue of retrospect
Makes so serenely excellent those days
When you and I, Pietro and Thaddeus,
Were cornerstones of his imperial life,
Miraculously graven with his love.
There never was on earth such dowered peace,
Such laughter blowing through old wisdom's cell,
Such intellect shot like a proud gold arrow
Into the giant freedom of the sun!
Mere memory of those times is more alive
Than the brash breathing days allowed most mortals!

That room, Berard, that opened on the sea,
Full of slant sunbeams in the afternoon,
Where he revised the idiot world's affairs
With you by as grave councillor and me,
No taller than a broadsword, listening,
Quite gravely too, as like as not my head
Against his knee, beneath his hovering hand —
That room touched with its inmate light the lengths
Of Araby, Illyria, England, Greece,
Dazzled outlandish folk beyond the Rhine,
Warmed Aragon, Provence, dull Austria,
And flared our own obscure sweet Sicily
Into the day-star of a starless night.
I'd listen in a blinking glow of wonder
To orders, laws, decisions, policies:
A fleet to Reggio; a thousand men to Jaffa;
A brace of falcons to the king of France;
To our beloved vassals of Cologne
A charter and the right of toll; requests
For cotton and the barley seed he promised
Of Sultan Kamel, our especial friend,
Appended to a note on Aristotle;
Exemption of all silk looms from taxation;
Death for a judge whose greed was not for justice;
Appointment of a notary for Flanders,
A seneschal for Treves, a captain for
The ships of oil and wheat outbound for India;
Our thanks to Brother Leo for the copy
Of that last Canticle as Francis wrote it,
Enclosing our own manuscript on hawking;
An edict granting freedom to the Jews:

The whole a brave clear text of liberal wisdom
Illumined with light-hearted blue and gold!
The pageant of the world passed through that room,
Their colors burning in the moted sunlight —
Ambassadors and pilgrims, knights and seers,
Star-gazers, troubadours, philosophers,
The wise, the wisdom-seeking, the renowned.
The race's best and foremost swarmed to him
As night-things to a streaming far-seen light.

But when the day was over, the candles lit,
The last petitioner gone, the empire's needs
Dismissed till morning, then it was, Berard,
The day began, for then we were alone.
He'd think aloud to me, pacing the room's length
Or standing mute, one hand lost in his beard,
His brain the battle-ground of two strong thoughts.
'Twas then the infinite details of his task
Assembled in perspective, and resolved
To fractions of his intricate patterned dream.
And when his vehement revery was done
That smile he had for me would quite uncloud
His face, and with one arm about my shoulder
He'd pass out to the sea-cooled balcony
Where the full darkness fell and no sound stole.
And he would stand there silent a long while,
Watching in a profound remote repose
The multitudinous slow flight of stars,
All hush and ecstasy, or, far beneath,
The bleak silver ocean barred with black,
Calm as eternity, though quivering always.

Then he would say: " Now let us sleep, my son.
The infinitudes of beauty with no toil
Pursue their ministries we may not guess,
Though vibrant to the music they exhale:
Our waking or our sleep will vex them not."
He was aware no keenlier of the actual
Than of the instigating powers that buoy us.
Caesar, I think, nor Alexander saw
So rightly nor so far into the dark.

The day that thrust me suddenly from boy's
To man's estate shines yet through fifteen years.
It was the day he honored Michael Scott
As though the king of India were his guest,
Not some pinched nobody in broidered gown
Of stars and moons and suns and hieroglyphs,
Who dubbed himself astrologer and watched
Dancing girls, rabbis, princes, desert sheiks —
The palace-full assembled in his honor —
In the cold English way and never laughed.
But most, I found, he watched my glowing father,
Single in debonair and gracious ease
Among the guests. And I could swear, Berard,
There was some dry and cynic pity in his gaze.
Then Pietro asked him, in a voice all heard,
What was the emperor's own fated star.
With his thin smile and pale satiric eyes
He answered in a blight of sudden silence
" Canopus," and again the silence closed.
My father's laugh was shorter than his words:
" A star so small his very name's unknown."

"Ask of your Arab friends," the wizard's voice
 Ran smooth as ice: "In fiery magnitude
 He is the greatest of all stars." "Then why,"
 Pursued my father, "should I have never seen
 His flaming orb?" There was a long strange pause.
 At last the answer came, but hardly heard:
 "He is too bright for our cold northern skies.
 They see him but an instant, then he goes."
 My father laughed, "Thanks for a brilliant moment,"
 And with accustomed calm and showered banter
 Passed through the company. Alone with me,
 In silence that seemed almost sorrowful,
 He reached the room I loved and sat awhile
 In some abstracted lassitude of thought,
 While I, boylike, wished Michael Scott were dead.
 Thus da Vigna found us.

O even now

'Tis hard to hate da Vigna — and then he seemed
 The perfect knight; as poet, councillor,
 Vice-regent, friend, the nonpareil and pattern.
 There was such glitter of resolve about him,
 Such frankness, yet such reticence of mood,
 As if he were a quarrying hawk that hovered
 For game far off before he flashed and struck.
 Ah, well, that night he only came to reckon
 What stallions would be needed for Apulia,
 And how Phoenician trade might be drawn off
 From Genoa and the purple ships of Venice.
 Pietro da Vigna leaned across the table
 Fingering maps and schedules while my father,

Sunk in his cushioned chair almost a throne,
Listened, the weavings of his burnished gown
Seeming to breathe in the gold-spun candlelight.
Then Pietro said the rebel town of Bari —
To capture which was his express stout task —
Had not yet fallen, nay, it would not fall
Until a further complement of men
Was furnished them that had attacked in vain.
There was a panther stir in the great chair.
“ I have no men to send you,” came his voice.
“ Then Bari holds out till the crack o’ doom,”
Broke bitterly from Pietro. My father grew
Stone still, and when his voice at last whipped out
It was no friendly voice: “ Why ask for men
Before you have exhausted gold and guile? ”
Da Vigna’s hand went dead among his papers
And dead his face, except his eyes that winced.
But he was silent. Again the emperor spoke:
“ Bribe them: or feast their leaders at a truce
And poison them.” Pietro at that leaped up,
Pale truly, but a thousand miles from fear:
“ Bribe or assassinate, your Majesty,
But find a fitter tool for such base work.”
His voice was steady challenge and despair.
I shut my eyes so that I might not see
My father’s terrible anger boiling up,
But when I looked his chin was on his hand
And he regarded Pietro dreamily
And from a cold great distance. Then he said,
As if in weariness: “ Sit down: compose
That answer to the Pope we planned together,

While I have Enzo read aloud to me
His last translation from the happy Greek.
His Arab master found it in Byzantium."
So, gulping down the terror I had felt,
I found the manuscript, leaned back against
His knees, and while da Vigna seemed to write
And he to sleep, for he was breathless-still,
With eyelids closed, I read aloud to him.
And the very candles seemed to fall asleep.

It was the story of the son of Helios,
His gold-haired only son, not yet a man,
Who, watching his divinely sinewed father
Drive from the stables of the dark each dawn
The chariot and horses of the sun,
Besought that he might be their driver once
And for one glorying lonely day race up
The azure mountain of the infinite air.
And dotingly his father gave him leave,
While his young sisters of the clear gold hair
Wept for him as they wandered by the river
Gathering hyacinths. But who may bear
The burden of all light through solitude
Except a god? Or, swathed in dizzy foam
Of hissing manes, hold to their difficult course
Those passionate stallions fed on naked fire?
Half up the sky, seething in whirlwind light,
He gazed in anguish on the earth he knew,
The friendly, populous earth, dappled with shade,
And through his sweat-bright hands the taut reins slipped.
Down plunged the horses, down the chariot plunged;

And like a meteor in full day descried
Headlong the gold-haired son of Helios fell —
Silent and lovely, his hand before his eyes. . . .
I ceased. There was great quietness, except
My father's hand was groping in my hair.
It seemed he had been speaking ere he spoke:
“ But thou shalt never fall, my son, nor guide
Alone the golden chariot of the sun.
My hands shall grasp the reins and close beside me
Thou shalt behold the turmoil of my sky,
The sweetness of thine earth, smiling, untroubled.”

He rose and paced the floor his pauseful way
When brooding, and smouldered as he dreamed aloud:
“ For mankind in the mass, truth is what works —
A creed, a fair illusion, a reward; —
Some worthy lie by which they shuffle through
In something that approaches happiness.
Not their content nor their accomplishment
Are for the few whose greed is truth itself.
Our desolate and ice-cold consolation
Is that no matter what the vacancy
Unstarred and horrible we stumble on
In the scheme of things, it cannot be as bleak
And choking and insufferable as this
All-drowning ignorance we welter in.
For us there are no terrors and few joys,
But only courage and a blown bright hope . . .
To grip the tatterdemalion unsorted world
And make a plan of it — that's our occupation:
Preëminently mine, who in the chaos

Am thrust as ruler, and recognize indeed
My own mind as a mountain among hills.
Were I an indolent dreamer I could weep
At all the tongues and all the arrogant creeds
Disharmonizing man, obscuring his
Essential unity and native likeness,
And wish in futile wrath to blot them out.
Instead, not futilely, I grapple facts;
And spite of races, tongues and creeds at odds
Impose the unity of my bold justice
Upon a turbulent world from Nazareth
To Ghent. . . . That is the ground-work of all
peace. . . .
Peace. Peace. The great prerequisite,
The race's single chance to reach its stature . . .
There's not a lie too great, a crime too gross
I'll not be guilty of, if so thereby
I may establish it and fix the lines
Of the quivering vision I intend the world. . . .
Am I the first that with sheer intellect
Has hated war, not weeping at its woe
So much as raging at its waste and folly?
Let me be first: and by the stablishment
Of peace I'll show my elders' errancy. . . .
And after peace I shall enchant the world
Into a universal Sicily
And prove life even can be livable. . . .

"Protect the masses in their breeding moil;
Feed them; and sweeten them by fear's remove:
But do not build for them, for they are doomed

To everyday contents and grievances —
Unspeculative, level, themselves their study.
But, oh, the flashing-eyed minority,
The Enzios of the world, the sons of light —
These I would turn free-pinioned on an earth
That they would make august and radiant!
Think, think, O gods, what freedom could mean here,
Freedom to think and be and to pursue
The sovereign hope a stormy heart may spring!
Never have they been loosened from the toils
Of fear, and sin imagined, and old thoughts,
And ever at their elbows threatened priest
Or king or skeleton of fleshly want.
I'll change all this: and for imperial boon
Grant freedom to the spirits of the free.
Watch them: already they are homing to me,
And there's no man today not sworn my vassal
If Truth or High Endeavor be his liege.
So much to learn, forgot or never learned!
Such flight-room for the gold bird of the mind!
Such loveliness to build or paint or set
In colored words of leisure on a parchment!
Oh, I conceive a breathing-space, for men
Of vested soul, grander than heaven; yea,
And possible, a point oft overlooked
In heavenly and terrestrial dreams, I judge.
And what to hinder, save the allotted span
Some yokel with a home-made stave may skimp?
So far I've won: my laws establish justice,
Justice peace, and the young future teems
To Naples and Salerno where my schools

Are aids and urgers to the starrier way.
My present is a sunny sky: but clouds
Unquietly from two bad quarters stir
And grope to make one storm, a storm so vast
It will blind out the opulent, life-giving sun. . . .
The rabble Lombard cities; and the Pope . . .
Can these bring back the ancient dark despite me?
Never. Never. Yet they draw off my force,
Like unjust judges; traitors; rebel cities —
Details a friend could spare me by assuming —
And I must close with them in battle. First,
The cities — orgulous, pestilently brave,
The pack of them fanging and foaming each on each
Like rutting dogs, and with the minds, means,
Manners of dogs. At large they bait the world
To brawls and bickerings, costly and futile:
But chained are frenzied martyrs howling 'Freedom,'
A word they fight for, but a fact, God knows,
They neither put to use nor grant to others.
The cities first: blood wasted and much gold,
But victory, the atrocious north restrained
And muzzled into manners and address. . . .
Then, Rome. . . . A struggle to the death, I fear. . . .
The war 'twixt emperors and popes will reach
In me its apogee, for good or ill.
Not that inherent differences appear
In Gregory's gage flung down to Frederick
And Hildebrand's to Barbarossa, but
The princes of the church divine in me
A serpent wiser and more venomous
Than in my crusty and impetuous grandsire.

He had perspective and fine taste for power
But was in fact a simple, loyal Christian.
While I — I see the thing that calls itself
Christ's Church a noble detriment, a dream
Once valid, but in the dawning old and evil.
I will concede the masses to the Pope:
Their stultified obedience makes for peace.
But I'll not give my eaglets to his cage:
For them there shall be freedom if it takes
The very toppling down of Peter's throne. . . .

“ How blistered is the earth with outpoured blood
Which on the ground has but a human look —
Not Christian, Jewish, or Mohammedan!
They slaughter each the other in the name
Of Allah, Christ, Jehovah, that one god
Who needs a name to be distinguishable.
And now in Albi they would further tear
Their Christian sect of Rome into another,
And later still another, and another,
Till down the centuries the jargon of
Their creeds will rile, I swear, sweet-tempered Heaven!
Three is enough! I join with Rome at Albi
To drown this heresy in good French blood.
Three is enough: yet not enough, I know. . . .
Jesus, Mahomet, Abraham — good men
Guessing! I read their words with reverence
And know that still the ultimate word's not written. . . .
When I have made my tablet of the laws
To guide the flight of my young Enzios,
'Thou shalt not' shall be missing from its rubric.

Perhaps two words will make its decalogue:
' Courage: Unselfishness.' These two suffice.
Oh, all this cry of ' sin,' these acts forbidden,
Ruffle my gorge! The Christian sins if meat
Is eat on Friday; the Jew if any day
He eats of pork; the Prophet's follower
If anything on any day he eats
With Jew or Christian at his friendly table.
Fools, fools, and serious fools who die
For imbecilities diverse but equal
With hortatives and childish talk of sin
They so have staled the cleanly natural air
That life stinks like a sick-room. Bah! their ' sin ' —
There is no taint save its own consequence
To any deed; and what is wise is good!
The centuries' experience of a deed's
Outcome and burthen aids our judgment of it
Before 'tis done, but is not sacrosanct
Or final. If men would but forget what not
To do, and fix their wills and uttermost minds
On what to do and do it — they'd breed the world
With loveliness and power beyond all guessing!
Virtue is energy directed wisely:
And sin is sloth. . . . How am I judged here, now,
By this religious and oppressive world?
All I have wrought for justice and for peace,
For beauty's burgeoning and joy's flower,
Are these emblazoned on a scroll of praise?
Hardly. But I am damned as heretic,
And worse — an irony for Kamel — lecher!
I am not chaste, and so I spoil for hell!

These priests that never do the deed, but dream of it
 Till their minds are porous — foetid — maggot's meat —
 They grieve for me, who feed the monster I
 Am caged in decently, I hope, and keep
 My mind robust and cold as mountain wind. . . .
 They do not even see the pity of it. . . .
 How mockingly are our sweet bodies made
 In that the very pang and leap of love
 Is circumstanced in filth and sorry loathing!
 And how wit-cursed the incarnating force
 That fashions the idiot with no more pain
 And no less air of nature justified
 Than when a stripling god like Enzo's born!
 No empress was your mother, Enzo;
 But you were not begot half-heartedly,
 Betwixt a dream and a sleep, the sanctioned way.

“ But these are incidentals of a life
 I purpose to make frank and vigorous. . . .
 ‘ Courage, Unselfishness,’ and the youth of the world
 At my heels! One could not fail with these nor shrink.
 Truth sleeps and has indeed its evil dreams,
 But never dies. . . . The Lombard cities scotched
 And Rome's pretensions clipped, defined, made harmless,
 I'll set the world upon a singing path
 And rank it king-star of the heavenly host!
 Such wisdom waits to be uncovered, Enzo,
 Such loveliness to be evoked! O gods,
 The splendor, majesty, and joy of life
 Have not been tapped, but only wait upon
 The spirit's franchise that I burn to grant. . . .

The chariot of the sun has issued forth,
The reins are in my hands — no turning back,
No stumbling, Enzo, nor halt, until
The azure circuit's run and regally
We rest our steeds in that mysterious stall —
Death's purple-raftered house. . . . Yet men stand back —
Men that should know and love me — balk at some item,
Some Bari thrust between me and my purpose,
Which is today in the great staggering world
The only godlike, all-inclusive scheme
Of hope and betterment. . . . Was Helios lonely? ”

He ceased, as if a great bell's toning ceased,
Leaving a chaos of grand sound and trembling.
Before the din had died, Pietro was speaking,
As tall and quiet-burning as a candle:
“ Imperial master, grant me leave to go.”
“ Whither? ” my father answered out of dimness.
“ To Bari, which shall fall before this moon
Has shed her horns.” Oh, it was good to hear
The wind of my father's laughter lift the shadows:
“ Petrus, wound me no more so bitterly!
When we have built the new Jerusalem
Your name shall indicate right well your rank.”
And from that day I was a boy no longer,
But saw his need of me and took my place.

That was the time life should have ceased, Berard,
Still fresh and glistening and mountain-aired,
Its only apprehension change or ending!
It is so grievous living past the prime

And looking back for all one's glimpse of glamour.
Surely no god who ever had been young
Could have watched idly so much loveliness
Undone! A wise and passionate innocence
Spangled our lives and made each hour awake
Keep the cool filmy fragrance of first waking. . . .
That passed too quickly — quicklier being lovely.
Our south, the south he loved so, saw him in
Pale lightning glimpses only after that night.
The storm was sooner breaking than he'd thought,
And never ended. Rome and the Lombard cities
Loosened their hate your news alone could quell.
Berard, Berard, it seems we have been fighting
Since the beginning of things, and all the rest's
A plaguing dream! And why it was — or when —
Or why it could not cease and let us be —
I cannot now remember. . . . Thanks, old friend. . . .
A faintness — yes — it's gone — the memories came
Too thick. . . . No, no, you cannot leave me yet!
Sleep is more torturing than weariness!
Just then when my eyes closed I saw his eyes —
Smoky with pain and void of recognition!
They make sleep full of fear: I cannot meet them!
Forgive me . . . I am not often not a man . . .
I am quite well now. . . . Yes, the air . . . the damp.
My window's small — but boasts Aldebaran,
A long hour, late. He's quite the same, Berard,
As when you taught a little boy his name
And pointed to him hanging through the palm trees.
It's very friendly of him to be here. . . .
I almost slipped from prison yesterday.

That was before I knew . . . My evil luck
Was Absalom's: one strand of tell-tale hair
Showed from the wine-butt I was hiding in. . . .
For that attempt I'm being lessoned now
On bread and water — I who was once a king!
Do you remember my first day of battle —
Cased in my golden greaves and coat of mail,
Burnished and proud and brave as seventeen?
He called me then Aldebaran, the prince
Of stars, and was as proud as I, but not
As far, as very far, from doubting tears. . . .

I soldiered well for seventeen: that's something:
And something more that three years afterward
I was commander of the imperial armies.
At first it had the zest of sportsmanship
And when we'd meet to plan some new campaign
My heart would swell to know myself his helper.
The best was when we thwarted Gregory.
That was my plan, Berard. To keep the Pope
From holding his great Conclave of the Church,
Or so much of it as was hostile to us,
Seemed of prime urgency, for, once assembled,
We had some glimmering of the onerous outcome.
My father had already sent his letter
To all the Christian kings of Christendom
Protesting 'gainst the Conclave's convocation.
How he and Pietro crackled at its making —
Its scriptural, grandiose air of indignation,
With just enough of formal reverence
To make them swallow down the new wild yeast

Of his rebellious and irreverent scorn.
And when they nominated Gregory
"The Beast with Horns" — and sternly — how we laughed!
It smacked of that audacious mad crusade
He undertook in jest or scorn or malice
And rounded to a cynical success
With wheat and oil and Kamel's tolerant friendship.
Yet in these scornful pranks one could detect
A calculated and subversive purpose:
To mock an idol without retribution
Will jar somewhat the best idolater.
Indeed, I think his mockery's work will last
When much far nobler will have been forgot.
But the letter, though it jarred the Christian kings,
Did not prevent the Conclave's call to Rome.
So, as our armies domineered all roads
Converging on the imperial city north
And south, leaving their sole approach by sea,
I offered, half as humorous solution,
To catch the Conclave as it paddled past,
Reeking of lauds and incense, but convoyed
Stoutly enough by the whole fleet of Genoa;
Which done, we'd drop that freightage of old bones —
Three hundred cardinals, archbishops, what-nots —
Into some wholesome dungeon, while the Pope
Would rant and fall to scribbling bulls and banns
At the empty council table. Here was a jest
Fateful, adventurous, that took my father:
Da Vigna too was hopeful: you were absent.
So we devised how I should take the fleet
Of Pisa with what tonnage of our own