

XLIII

He smiled on those bold Romans
 A smile serene and high ;
 He eyed the flinching Tuscans,
 And scorn was in his eye.

Quoth he, "The she-wolf's litter⁵⁷

360

Stand savagely at bay :
 But will ye dare to follow,
 If Astur clears the way ?"

XLIV

Then, whirling up his broadsword
 With both hands to the height,

365

He rushed against Horatius,
 And smote with all his might.

With shield and blade Horatius,
 Right deftly turned the blow.

The blow, though turned, came yet too nigh :

370

It missed his helm, but gashed his thigh :

The Tuscans raised a joyful cry

To see the red blood flow.

XLV

He reeled, and on Herminius

He leaned one breathing-space ;

375

Then, like a wild-cat mad with wounds,

Sprang right at Astur's face.

Through teeth, and skull, and helmet

So fierce a thrust he sped,

The good sword stood a hand-breadth out

380

Behind the Tuscan's head.

⁵⁷ The she-wolf's litter. A reference to the legend of Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of Rome, who were said to have been suckled by a she-wolf.