

The Vision of Purgatory, Part 1 Translated By The Rev. H. F. Cary, Illustrated by Gustave Dore

Dante Alighieri

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Produced by David Widger

THE VISION
OF
HELL, PURGATORY, AND PARADISE
BY DANTE ALIGHIERI

TRANSLATED BY
THE REV. H. F. CARY

PURGATORY

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Part 1

Cantos 1 - 4

CANTO I

O'er better waves to speed her rapid course
The light bark of my genius lifts the sail,
Well pleas'd to leave so cruel sea behind;
And of that second region will I sing,
In which the human spirit from sinful blot
Is purg'd, and for ascent to Heaven prepares.

Here, O ye hallow'd Nine! for in your train
I follow, here the deadened strain revive;
Nor let Calliope refuse to sound
A somewhat higher song, of that loud tone,
Which when the wretched birds of chattering note
Had heard, they of forgiveness lost all hope.

Sweet hue of eastern sapphire, that was spread
O'er the serene aspect of the pure air,
High up as the first circle, to mine eyes
Unwonted joy renew'd, soon as I 'scap'd
Forth from the atmosphere of deadly gloom,
That had mine eyes and bosom fill'd with grief.
The radiant planet, that to love invites,
Made all the orient laugh, and veil'd beneath
The Pisces' light, that in his escort came.

To the right hand I turn'd, and fix'd my mind
On the' other pole attentive, where I saw
Four stars ne'er seen before save by the ken
Of our first parents. Heaven of their rays
Seem'd joyous. O thou northern site, bereft
Indeed, and widow'd, since of these depriv'd!

As from this view I had desisted, straight
Turning a little tow'rds the other pole,
There from whence now the wain had disappear'd,
I saw an old man standing by my side
Alone, so worthy of rev'rence in his look,
That ne'er from son to father more was ow'd.
Low down his beard and mix'd with hoary white
Descended, like his locks, which parting fell
Upon his breast in double fold. The beams
Of those four luminaries on his face
So brightly shone, and with such radiance clear
Deck'd it, that I beheld him as the sun.

"Say who are ye, that stemming the blind stream,
Forth from th' eternal prison-house have fled?"
He spoke and moved those venerable plumes.
"Who hath conducted, or with lantern sure
Lights you emerging from the depth of night,
That makes the infernal valley ever black?"

Are the firm statutes of the dread abyss
Broken, or in high heaven new laws ordain'd,
That thus, condemn'd, ye to my caves approach?"

My guide, then laying hold on me, by words
And intimations given with hand and head,
Made my bent knees and eye submissive pay
Due reverence; then thus to him replied.

"Not of myself I come; a Dame from heaven
Descending, had besought me in my charge
To bring. But since thy will implies, that more
Our true condition I unfold at large,
Mine is not to deny thee thy request.
This mortal ne'er hath seen the farthest gloom.
But erring by his folly had approach'd
So near, that little space was left to turn.
Then, as before I told, I was dispatch'd
To work his rescue, and no way remain'd
Save this which I have ta'en. I have display'd
Before him all the regions of the bad;
And purpose now those spirits to display,
That under thy command are purg'd from sin.
How I have brought him would be long to say.
From high descends the virtue, by whose aid
I to thy sight and hearing him have led.
Now may our coming please thee. In the search
Of liberty he journeys: that how dear
They know, who for her sake have life refus'd.
Thou knowest, to whom death for her was sweet
In Utica, where thou didst leave those weeds,
That in the last great day will shine so bright.
For us the' eternal edicts are unmov'd:
He breathes, and I am free of Minos' power,
Abiding in that circle where the eyes
Of thy chaste Marcia beam, who still in look
Prays thee, O hallow'd spirit! to own her shine.
Then by her love we' implore thee, let us pass
Through thy sev'n regions; for which best thanks
I for thy favour will to her return,
If mention there below thou not disdain."

"Marcia so pleasing in my sight was found,"
He then to him rejoind, "while I was there,
That all she ask'd me I was fain to grant.
Now that beyond the' accursed stream she dwells,
She may no longer move me, by that law,
Which was ordain'd me, when I issued thence.
Not so, if Dame from heaven, as thou sayst,
Moves and directs thee; then no flattery needs.
Enough for me that in her name thou ask.
Go therefore now: and with a slender reed
See that thou duly gird him, and his face
Lave, till all sordid stain thou wipe from thence.
For not with eye, by any cloud obscur'd,
Would it be seemly before him to come,
Who stands the foremost minister in heaven.
This islet all around, there far beneath,
Where the wave beats it, on the oozy bed

Produces store of reeds. No other plant,
Cover'd with leaves, or harden'd in its stalk,
There lives, not bending to the water's sway.
After, this way return not; but the sun
Will show you, that now rises, where to take
The mountain in its easiest ascent."

He disappear'd; and I myself uprais'd
Speechless, and to my guide retiring close,
Toward him turn'd mine eyes. He thus began;
"My son! observant thou my steps pursue.
We must retreat to rearward, for that way
The champain to its low extreme declines."

The dawn had chas'd the matin hour of prime,
Which deaf before it, so that from afar
I spy'd the trembling of the ocean stream.

We travers'd the deserted plain, as one
Who, wander'd from his track, thinks every step
Trodden in vain till he regain the path.

When we had come, where yet the tender dew
Strove with the sun, and in a place, where fresh
The wind breath'd o'er it, while it slowly dried;
Both hands extended on the watery grass
My master plac'd, in graceful act and kind.
Whence I of his intent before appriz'd,
Stretch'd out to him my cheeks suffus'd with tears.
There to my visage he anew restor'd
That hue, which the dun shades of hell conceal'd.

Then on the solitary shore arriv'd,
That never sailing on its waters saw
Man, that could after measure back his course,
He girt me in such manner as had pleas'd
Him who instructed, and O, strange to tell!
As he selected every humble plant,
Wherever one was pluck'd, another there
Resembling, straightway in its place arose.

CANTO II

Now had the sun to that horizon reach'd,
That covers, with the most exalted point
Of its meridian circle, Salem's walls,
And night, that opposite to him her orb
Sounds, from the stream of Ganges issued forth,
Holding the scales, that from her hands are dropp'd
When she reigns highest: so that where I was,
Aurora's white and vermeil-tinctur'd cheek
To orange turn'd as she in age increas'd.

Meanwhile we linger'd by the water's brink,
Like men, who, musing on their road, in thought
Journey, while motionless the body rests.

When lo! as near upon the hour of dawn,
Through the thick vapours Mars with fiery beam
Glares down in west, over the ocean floor;
So seem'd, what once again I hope to view,
A light so swiftly coming through the sea,
No winged course might equal its career.
From which when for a space I had withdrawn
Thine eyes, to make inquiry of my guide,
Again I look'd and saw it grown in size
And brightness: thou on either side appear'd
Something, but what I knew not of bright hue,
And by degrees from underneath it came
Another. My preceptor silent yet
Stood, while the brightness, that we first discern'd,
Open'd the form of wings: then when he knew
The pilot, cried aloud, "Down, down; bend low
Thy knees; behold God's angel: fold thy hands:
Now shalt thou see true Ministers indeed.

"Lo how all human means he sets at naught!
So that nor oar he needs, nor other sail
Except his wings, between such distant shores.
Lo how straight up to heaven he holds them rear'd,
Winnowing the air with those eternal plumes,
That not like mortal hairs fall off or change!"

As more and more toward us came, more bright
Appear'd the bird of God, nor could the eye
Endure his splendor near: I mine bent down.
He drove ashore in a small bark so swift
And light, that in its course no wave it drank.
The heav'nly steersman at the prow was seen,
Visibly written blessed in his looks.

Within a hundred spirits and more there sat.
"In Exitu Israel de Aegypto;"
All with one voice together sang, with what
In the remainder of that hymn is writ.
Then soon as with the sign of holy cross
He bless'd them, they at once leap'd out on land,
The swiftly as he came return'd. The crew,
There left, appear'd astounded with the place,
Gazing around as one who sees new sights.

From every side the sun darted his beams,
And with his arrowy radiance from mid heav'n
Had chas'd the Capricorn, when that strange tribe
Lifting their eyes towards us: "If ye know,
Declare what path will Lead us to the mount."

Them Virgil answer'd. "Ye suppose perchance
Us well acquainted with this place: but here,
We, as yourselves, are strangers. Not long erst
We came, before you but a little space,
By other road so rough and hard, that now
The' ascent will seem to us as play." The spirits,
Who from my breathing had perceiv'd I liv'd,
Grew pale with wonder. As the multitude
Flock round a herald, sent with olive branch,

To hear what news he brings, and in their haste
Tread one another down, e'en so at sight
Of me those happy spirits were fix'd, each one
Forgetful of its errand, to depart,
Where cleans'd from sin, it might be made all fair.

Then one I saw darting before the rest
With such fond ardour to embrace me, I
To do the like was mov'd. O shadows vain
Except in outward semblance! thrice my hands
I clasp'd behind it, they as oft return'd
Empty into my breast again. Surprise
I needs must think was painted in my looks,
For that the shadow smil'd and backward drew.
To follow it I hasten'd, but with voice
Of sweetness it enjoin'd me to desist.
Then who it was I knew, and pray'd of it,
To talk with me, it would a little pause.
It answered: "Thee as in my mortal frame
I lov'd, so loos'd forth it I love thee still,
And therefore pause; but why walkest thou here?"

"Not without purpose once more to return,
Thou find'st me, my Casella, where I am
Journeying this way;" I said, "but how of thee
Hath so much time been lost?" He answer'd straight:
"No outrage hath been done to me, if he
Who when and whom he chooses takes, me oft
This passage hath denied, since of just will
His will he makes. These three months past indeed,
He, whose chose to enter, with free leave
Hath taken; whence I wand'ring by the shore
Where Tyber's wave grows salt, of him gain'd kind
Admittance, at that river's mouth, tow'rd which
His wings are pointed, for there always throng
All such as not to Archeron descend."

Then I: "If new laws have not quite destroy'd
Memory and use of that sweet song of love,
That while all my cares had power to 'swage;
Please thee with it a little to console
My spirit, that incumber'd with its frame,
Travelling so far, of pain is overcome."

"Love that discourses in my thoughts." He then
Began in such soft accents, that within
The sweetness thrills me yet. My gentle guide
And all who came with him, so well were pleas'd,
That seem'd naught else might in their thoughts have room.

Fast fix'd in mute attention to his notes
We stood, when lo! that old man venerable
Exclaiming, "How is this, ye tardy spirits?
What negligence detains you loit'ring here?
Run to the mountain to cast off those scales,
That from your eyes the sight of God conceal."

As a wild flock of pigeons, to their food
Collected, blade or tares, without their pride

Accustom'd, and in still and quiet sort,
If aught alarm them, suddenly desert
Their meal, assail'd by more important care;
So I that new-come troop beheld, the song
Deserting, hasten to the mountain's side,
As one who goes yet where he tends knows not.

Nor with less hurried step did we depart.

CANTO III

Them sudden flight had scatter'd over the plain,
Turn'd tow'rds the mountain, whither reason's voice
Drives us; I to my faithful company
Adhering, left it not. For how of him
Depriv'd, might I have sped, or who beside
Would o'er the mountainous tract have led my steps
He with the bitter pang of self-remorse
Seem'd smitten. O clear conscience and upright
How doth a little fling wound thee sore!

Soon as his feet desisted (slack'ning pace),
From haste, that mars all decency of act,
My mind, that in itself before was wrapt,
Its thoughts expanded, as with joy restor'd:
And full against the steep ascent I set
My face, where highest to heav'n its top o'erflows.

The sun, that flar'd behind, with ruddy beam
Before my form was broken; for in me
His rays resistance met. I turn'd aside
With fear of being left, when I beheld
Only before myself the ground obscur'd.
When thus my solace, turning him around,
Bespake me kindly: "Why distrustest thou?
Believ'st not I am with thee, thy sure guide?
It now is evening there, where buried lies
The body, in which I cast a shade, remov'd
To Naples from Brundisium's wall. Nor thou
Marvel, if before me no shadow fall,
More than that in the sky element
One ray obstructs not other. To endure
Torments of heat and cold extreme, like frames
That virtue hath dispos'd, which how it works
Wills not to us should be reveal'd. Insane
Who hopes, our reason may that space explore,
Which holds three persons in one substance knit.
Seek not the wherefore, race of human kind;
Could ye have seen the whole, no need had been
For Mary to bring forth. Moreover ye
Have seen such men desiring fruitlessly;
To whose desires repose would have been giv'n,
That now but serve them for eternal grief.
I speak of Plato, and the Stagyrte,
And others many more." And then he bent
Downwards his forehead, and in troubled mood

Broke off his speech. Meanwhile we had arriv'd
Far as the mountain's foot, and there the rock
Found of so steep ascent, that nimblest steps
To climb it had been vain. The most remote
Most wild untrodden path, in all the tract
'Twixt Lerice and Turbia were to this
A ladder easy' and open of access.

"Who knows on which hand now the steep declines?"
My master said and paus'd, "so that he may
Ascend, who journeys without aid of wine?"
And while with looks directed to the ground
The meaning of the pathway he explor'd,
And I gaz'd upward round the stony height,
Of spirits, that toward us mov'd their steps,
Yet moving seem'd not, they so slow approach'd.

I thus my guide address'd: "Upraise thine eyes,
Lo that way some, of whom thou may'st obtain
Counsel, if of thyself thou find'st it not!"

Straightway he look'd, and with free speech replied:
"Let us tend thither: they but softly come.
And thou be firm in hope, my son below'd."

Now was that people distant far in space
A thousand paces behind ours, as much
As at a throw the nervous arm could fling,
When all drew backward on the messy crags
Of the steep bank, and firmly stood unmov'd
As one who walks in doubt might stand to look.

"O spirits perfect! O already chosen!"
Virgil to them began, "by that blest peace,
Which, as I deem, is for you all prepar'd,
Instruct us where the mountain low declines,
So that attempt to mount it be not vain.
For who knows most, him loss of time most grieves."

As sheep, that step from forth their fold, by one,
Or pairs, or three at once; meanwhile the rest
Stand fearfully, bending the eye and nose
To ground, and what the foremost does, that do
The others, gath'ring round her, if she stops,
Simple and quiet, nor the cause discern;
So saw I moving to advance the first,
Who of that fortunate crew were at the head,
Of modest mien and graceful in their gait.
When they before me had beheld the light
From my right side fall broken on the ground,
So that the shadow reach'd the cave, they stopp'd
And somewhat back retir'd: the same did all,
Who follow'd, though unweeting of the cause.

"Unask'd of you, yet freely I confess,
This is a human body which ye see.
That the sun's light is broken on the ground,
Marvel not: but believe, that not without
Virtue deriv'd from Heaven, we to climb

Over this wall aspire." So them bespake
My master; and that virtuous tribe rejoin'd;
"Turn, and before you there the entrance lies,"
Making a signal to us with bent hands.

Then of them one began. "Whoe'er thou art,
Who journey'st thus this way, thy visage turn,
Think if me elsewhere thou hast ever seen."

I tow'rds him turn'd, and with fix'd eye beheld.
Comely, and fair, and gentle of aspect,
He seem'd, but on one brow a gash was mark'd.

When humbly I disclaim'd to have beheld
Him ever: "Now behold!" he said, and show'd
High on his breast a wound: then smiling spake.

"I am Manfredi, grandson to the Queen
Costanza: whence I pray thee, when return'd,
To my fair daughter go, the parent glad
Of Aragonia and Sicilia's pride;
And of the truth inform her, if of me
Aught else be told. When by two mortal blows
My frame was shatter'd, I betook myself
Weeping to him, who of free will forgives.
My sins were horrible; but so wide arms
Hath goodness infinite, that it receives
All who turn to it. Had this text divine
Been of Cosenza's shepherd better scann'd,
Who then by Clement on my hunt was set,
Yet at the bridge's head my bones had lain,
Near Benevento, by the heavy mole
Protected; but the rain now drenches them,
And the wind drives, out of the kingdom's bounds,
Far as the stream of Verde, where, with lights
Extinguish'd, he remov'd them from their bed.
Yet by their curse we are not so destroy'd,
But that the eternal love may turn, while hope
Retains her verdant blossoms. True it is,
That such one as in contumacy dies
Against the holy church, though he repent,
Must wander thirty-fold for all the time
In his presumption past; if such decree
Be not by prayers of good men shorter made
Look therefore if thou canst advance my bliss;
Revealing to my good Costanza, how
Thou hast beheld me, and beside the terms
Laid on me of that interdict; for here
By means of those below much profit comes."

CANTO IV

When by sensations of delight or pain,
That any of our faculties hath seiz'd,
Entire the soul collects herself, it seems
She is intent upon that power alone,

And thus the error is disprov'd which holds
The soul not singly lighted in the breast.
And therefore when as aught is heard or seen,
That firmly keeps the soul toward it turn'd,
Time passes, and a man perceives it not.
For that, whereby he hearken, is one power,
Another that, which the whole spirit hash;
This is as it were bound, while that is free.

This found I true by proof, hearing that spirit
And wond'ring; for full fifty steps aloft
The sun had measur'd unobserv'd of me,
When we arriv'd where all with one accord
The spirits shouted, "Here is what ye ask."

A larger aperture oft-times is stopp'd
With forked stake of thorn by villager,
When the ripe grape imbrovns, than was the path,
By which my guide, and I behind him close,
Ascended solitary, when that troop
Departing left us. On Sanleo's road
Who journeys, or to Noli low descends,
Or mounts Bismantua's height, must use his feet;
But here a man had need to fly, I mean
With the swift wing and plumes of high desire,
Conducted by his aid, who gave me hope,
And with light furnish'd to direct my way.

We through the broken rock ascended, close
Pent on each side, while underneath the ground
Ask'd help of hands and feet. When we arriv'd
Near on the highest ridge of the steep bank,
Where the plain level open'd I exclaim'd,
"O master! say which way can we proceed?"

He answer'd, "Let no step of thine recede.
Behind me gain the mountain, till to us
Some practis'd guide appear." That eminence
Was lofty that no eye might reach its point,
And the side proudly rising, more than line
From the mid quadrant to the centre drawn.
I wearied thus began: "Parent belov'd!
Turn, and behold how I remain alone,
If thou stay not."--" My son!" He straight reply'd,
"Thus far put forth thy strength;" and to a track
Pointed, that, on this side projecting, round
Circles the hill. His words so spurr'd me on,
That I behind him clamb'ring, forc'd myself,
Till my feet press'd the circuit plain beneath.
There both together seated, turn'd we round
To eastward, whence was our ascent: and oft
Many beside have with delight look'd back.

First on the nether shores I turn'd my eyes,
Then rais'd them to the sun, and wond'ring mark'd
That from the left it smote us. Soon perceiv'd
That Poet sage now at the car of light
Amaz'd I stood, where 'twixt us and the north
Its course it enter'd. Whence he thus to me:

"Were Leda's offspring now in company
Of that broad mirror, that high up and low
Imparts his light beneath, thou might'st behold
The ruddy zodiac nearer to the bears
Wheel, if its ancient course it not forsook.
How that may be if thou would'st think; within
Pond'ring, imagine Sion with this mount
Plac'd on the earth, so that to both be one
Horizon, and two hemispheres apart,
Where lies the path that Phaeton ill knew
To guide his erring chariot: thou wilt see
How of necessity by this on one
He passes, while by that on the' other side,
If with clear view shine intellect attend."

"Of truth, kind teacher!" I exclaim'd, "so clear
Aught saw I never, as I now discern
Where seem'd my ken to fail, that the mid orb
Of the supernal motion (which in terms
Of art is called the Equator, and remains
Ever between the sun and winter) for the cause
Thou hast assign'd, from hence toward the north
Departs, when those who in the Hebrew land
Inhabit, see it tow'rds the warmer part.
But if it please thee, I would gladly know,
How far we have to journey: for the hill
Mounts higher, than this sight of mine can mount."

He thus to me: "Such is this steep ascent,
That it is ever difficult at first,
But, more a man proceeds, less evil grows.
When pleasant it shall seem to thee, so much
That upward going shall be easy to thee.
As in a vessel to go down the tide,
Then of this path thou wilt have reach'd the end.
There hope to rest thee from thy toil. No more
I answer, and thus far for certain know."
As he his words had spoken, near to us
A voice there sounded: "Yet ye first perchance
May to repose you by constraint be led."
At sound thereof each turn'd, and on the left
A huge stone we beheld, of which nor I
Nor he before was ware. Thither we drew,
find there were some, who in the shady place
Behind the rock were standing, as a man
Thru' idleness might stand. Among them one,
Who seem'd to me much wearied, sat him down,
And with his arms did fold his knees about,
Holding his face between them downward bent.

"Sweet Sir!" I cry'd, "behold that man, who shows
Himself more idle, than if laziness
Were sister to him." Straight he turn'd to us,
And, o'er the thigh lifting his face, observ'd,
Then in these accents spake: "Up then, proceed
Thou valiant one." Straight who it was I knew;
Nor could the pain I felt (for want of breath
Still somewhat urg'd me) hinder my approach.
And when I came to him, he scarce his head

Uplifted, saying "Well hast thou discern'd,
How from the left the sun his chariot leads."

His lazy acts and broken words my lips
To laughter somewhat mov'd; when I began:
"Belacqua, now for thee I grieve no more.
But tell, why thou art seated upright there?
Waitest thou escort to conduct thee hence?
Or blame I only shine accustom'd ways?"
Then he: "My brother, of what use to mount,
When to my suffering would not let me pass
The bird of God, who at the portal sits?
Behooves so long that heav'n first bear me round
Without its limits, as in life it bore,
Because I to the end repentant Sighs
Delay'd, if prayer do not aid me first,
That riseth up from heart which lives in grace.
What other kind avails, not heard in heaven?"

Before me now the Poet up the mount
Ascending, cried: "Haste thee, for see the sun
Has touch'd the point meridian, and the night
Now covers with her foot Marocco's shore."

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