

The Vision of Purgatory, Part 4 Translated By The Rev. H. F. Cary, Illustrated by Gustave Dore

Dante Alighieri

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

TRANSLATED BY
THE REV. H. F. CARY

PURGATORY

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Part 4

Cantos 19 - 25

CANTO XIX

It was the hour, when of diurnal heat
No reliques chafe the cold beams of the moon,
O'erpower'd by earth, or planetary sway
Of Saturn; and the geomancer sees
His Greater Fortune up the east ascend,
Where gray dawn checkers first the shadowy cone;
When 'fore me in my dream a woman's shape
There came, with lips that stammer'd, eyes aslant,
Distorted feet, hands maim'd, and colour pale.

I look'd upon her; and as sunshine cheers
Limbs numb'd by nightly cold, e'en thus my look
Unloos'd her tongue, next in brief space her form
Decrepit rais'd erect, and faded face
With love's own hue illum'd. Recov'ring speech
She forthwith warbling such a strain began,
That I, how loth soe'er, could scarce have held
Attention from the song. "I," thus she sang,
"I am the Siren, she, whom mariners
On the wide sea are wilder'd when they hear:
Such fulness of delight the list'ner feels.
I from his course Ulysses by my lay
Enchanted drew. Whoe'er frequents me once
Parts seldom; so I charm him, and his heart
Contented knows no void." Or ere her mouth
Was clos'd, to shame her at her side appear'd
A dame of semblance holy. With stern voice
She utter'd; "Say, O Virgil, who is this?"
Which hearing, he approach'd, with eyes still bent
Toward that goodly presence: th' other seiz'd her,
And, her robes tearing, open'd her before,
And show'd the belly to me, whence a smell,
Exhaling loathsome, wak'd me. Round I turn'd
Mine eyes, and thus the teacher: "At the least
Three times my voice hath call'd thee. Rise, begone.
Let us the opening find where thou mayst pass."

I straightway rose. Now day, pour'd down from high,
Fill'd all the circuits of the sacred mount;
And, as we journey'd, on our shoulder smote
The early ray. I follow'd, stooping low
My forehead, as a man, o'ercharg'd with thought,
Who bends him to the likeness of an arch,
That midway spans the flood; when thus I heard,
"Come, enter here," in tone so soft and mild,
As never met the ear on mortal strand.

With swan-like wings dispread and pointing up,
Who thus had spoken marshal'd us along,

Where each side of the solid masonry
The sloping, walls retir'd; then mov'd his plumes,
And fanning us, affirm'd that those, who mourn,
Are blessed, for that comfort shall be theirs.

"What aileth thee, that still thou look'st to earth?"
Began my leader; while th' angelic shape
A little over us his station took.

"New vision," I replied, "hath rais'd in me
Surmisings strange and anxious doubts, whereon
My soul intent allows no other thought
Or room or entrance."--"Hast thou seen," said he,
"That old enchantress, her, whose wiles alone
The spirits o'er us weep for? Hast thou seen
How man may free him of her bonds? Enough.
Let thy heels spurn the earth, and thy rais'd ken
Fix on the lure, which heav'n's eternal King
Whirls in the rolling spheres." As on his feet
The falcon first looks down, then to the sky
Turns, and forth stretches eager for the food,
That woos him thither; so the call I heard,
So onward, far as the dividing rock
Gave way, I journey'd, till the plain was reach'd.

On the fifth circle when I stood at large,
A race appear'd before me, on the ground
All downward lying prone and weeping sore.
"My soul hath cleaved to the dust," I heard
With sighs so deep, they well nigh choak'd the words.
"O ye elect of God, whose penal woes
Both hope and justice mitigate, direct
Tow'rds the steep rising our uncertain way."

"If ye approach secure from this our doom,
Prostration--and would urge your course with speed,
See that ye still to rightward keep the brink."

So them the bard besought; and such the words,
Beyond us some short space, in answer came.

I noted what remain'd yet hidden from them:
Thence to my liege's eyes mine eyes I bent,
And he, forthwith interpreting their suit,
Beckon'd his glad assent. Free then to act,
As pleas'd me, I drew near, and took my stand
O'er that shade, whose words I late had mark'd.
And, "Spirit!" I said, "in whom repentant tears
Mature that blessed hour, when thou with God
Shalt find acceptance, for a while suspend
For me that mightier care. Say who thou wast,
Why thus ye grovel on your bellies prone,
And if in aught ye wish my service there,
Whence living I am come." He answering spake
"The cause why Heav'n our back toward his cope
Reverses, shalt thou know: but me know first
The successor of Peter, and the name
And title of my lineage from that stream,
That' twixt Chiaveri and Siestri draws

His limpid waters through the lowly glen.
A month and little more by proof I learnt,
With what a weight that robe of sov'reignty
Upon his shoulder rests, who from the mire
Would guard it: that each other fardel seems
But feathers in the balance. Late, alas!
Was my conversion: but when I became
Rome's pastor, I discern'd at once the dream
And cozenage of life, saw that the heart
Rested not there, and yet no prouder height
Lur'd on the climber: wherefore, of that life
No more enamour'd, in my bosom love
Of purer being kindled. For till then
I was a soul in misery, alienate
From God, and covetous of all earthly things;
Now, as thou seest, here punish'd for my doting.
Such cleansing from the taint of avarice
Do spirits converted need. This mount inflicts
No direr penalty. E'en as our eyes
Fasten'd below, nor e'er to loftier clime
Were lifted, thus hath justice level'd us
Here on the earth. As avarice quench'd our love
Of good, without which is no working, thus
Here justice holds us prison'd, hand and foot
Chain'd down and bound, while heaven's just Lord shall please.
So long to tarry motionless outstretch'd."

My knees I stoop'd, and would have spoke; but he,
Ere my beginning, by his ear perceiv'd
I did him reverence; and "What cause," said he,
"Hath bow'd thee thus!"--"Compunction," I rejoin'd.
"And inward awe of your high dignity."

"Up," he exclaim'd, "brother! upon thy feet
Arise: err not: thy fellow servant I,
(Thine and all others') of one Sovran Power.
If thou hast ever mark'd those holy sounds
Of gospel truth, 'nor shall be given ill marriage,'
Thou mayst discern the reasons of my speech.
Go thy ways now; and linger here no more.
Thy tarrying is a let unto the tears,
With which I hasten that whereof thou spak'st.
I have on earth a kinswoman; her name
Alagia, worthy in herself, so ill
Example of our house corrupt her not:
And she is all remaineth of me there."

CANTO XX

Ill strives the will, 'gainst will more wise that strives
His pleasure therefore to mine own preferr'd,
I drew the sponge yet thirsty from the wave.

Onward I mov'd: he also onward mov'd,
Who led me, coasting still, wherever place
Along the rock was vacant, as a man

Walks near the battlements on narrow wall.
For those on th' other part, who drop by drop
Wring out their all-infecting malady,
Too closely press the verge. Accurst be thou!
Inveterate wolf! whose gorge ingluts more prey,
Than every beast beside, yet is not fill'd!
So bottomless thy maw!--Ye spheres of heaven!
To whom there are, as seems, who attribute
All change in mortal state, when is the day
Of his appearing, for whom fate reserves
To chase her hence?--With wary steps and slow
We pass'd; and I attentive to the shades,
Whom piteously I heard lament and wail;

And, 'midst the wailing, one before us heard
Cry out "O blessed Virgin!" as a dame
In the sharp pangs of childbed; and "How poor
Thou wast," it added, "witness that low roof
Where thou didst lay thy sacred burden down.
O good Fabricius! thou didst virtue choose
With poverty, before great wealth with vice."

The words so pleas'd me, that desire to know
The spirit, from whose lip they seem'd to come,
Did draw me onward. Yet it spake the gift
Of Nicholas, which on the maidens he
Bounteous bestow'd, to save their youthful prime
Unblemish'd. "Spirit! who dost speak of deeds
So worthy, tell me who thou was," I said,
"And why thou dost with single voice renew
Memorial of such praise. That boon vouchsaf'd
Haply shall meet reward; if I return
To finish the Short pilgrimage of life,
Still speeding to its close on restless wing."

"I," answer'd he, "will tell thee, not for hell,
Which thence I look for; but that in thyself
Grace so exceeding shines, before thy time
Of mortal dissolution. I was root
Of that ill plant, whose shade such poison sheds
O'er all the Christian land, that seldom thence
Good fruit is gather'd. Vengeance soon should come,
Had Ghent and Douay, Lille and Bruges power;
And vengeance I of heav'n's great Judge implore.
Hugh Capet was I high: from me descend
The Philips and the Louis, of whom France
Newly is govern'd; born of one, who ply'd
The slaughterer's trade at Paris. When the race
Of ancient kings had vanish'd (all save one
Wrapt up in sable weeds) within my gripe
I found the reins of empire, and such powers
Of new acquirement, with full store of friends,
That soon the widow'd circlet of the crown
Was girt upon the temples of my son,
He, from whose bones th' anointed race begins.
Till the great dower of Provence had remov'd
The stains, that yet obscur'd our lowly blood,
Its sway indeed was narrow, but howe'er
It wrought no evil: there, with force and lies,

Began its rapine; after, for amends,
Poitou it seiz'd, Navarre and Gascony.
To Italy came Charles, and for amends
Young Conradine an innocent victim slew,
And sent th' angelic teacher back to heav'n,
Still for amends. I see the time at hand,
That forth from France invites another Charles
To make himself and kindred better known.
Unarm'd he issues, saving with that lance,
Which the arch-traitor tilted with; and that
He carries with so home a thrust, as rives
The bowels of poor Florence. No increase
Of territory hence, but sin and shame
Shall be his guerdon, and so much the more
As he more lightly deems of such foul wrong.
I see the other, who a prisoner late
Had steps on shore, exposing to the mart
His daughter, whom he bargains for, as do
The Corsairs for their slaves. O avarice!
What canst thou more, who hast subdued our blood
So wholly to thyself, they feel no care
Of their own flesh? To hide with direr guilt
Past ill and future, lo! the flower-de-luce
Enters Alagna! in his Vicar Christ
Himself a captive, and his mockery
Acted again! Lo! to his holy lip
The vinegar and gall once more applied!
And he 'twixt living robbers doom'd to bleed!
Lo! the new Pilate, of whose cruelty
Such violence cannot fill the measure up,
With no degree to sanction, pushes on
Into the temple his yet eager sails!

"O sovran Master! when shall I rejoice
To see the vengeance, which thy wrath well-pleas'd
In secret silence broods?--While daylight lasts,
So long what thou didst hear of her, sole spouse
Of the Great Spirit, and on which thou turn'dst
To me for comment, is the general theme
Of all our prayers: but when it darkens, then
A different strain we utter, then record
Pygmalion, whom his gluttonous thirst of gold
Made traitor, robber, parricide: the woes
Of Midas, which his greedy wish ensued,
Mark'd for derision to all future times:
And the fond Achan, how he stole the prey,
That yet he seems by Joshua's ire pursued.
Sapphira with her husband next, we blame;
And praise the forefeet, that with furious ramp
Spurn'd Heliodorus. All the mountain round
Rings with the infamy of Thracia's king,
Who slew his Phrygian charge: and last a shout
Ascends: "Declare, O Crassus! for thou know'st,
The flavour of thy gold." The voice of each
Now high now low, as each his impulse prompts,
Is led through many a pitch, acute or grave.
Therefore, not singly, I erewhile rehears'd
That blessedness we tell of in the day:
But near me none beside his accent rais'd."

From him we now had parted, and essay'd
With utmost efforts to surmount the way,
When I did feel, as nodding to its fall,
The mountain tremble; whence an icy chill
Seiz'd on me, as on one to death convey'd.
So shook not Delos, when Latona there
Couch'd to bring forth the twin-born eyes of heaven.

Forthwith from every side a shout arose
So vehement, that suddenly my guide
Drew near, and cried: "Doubt not, while I conduct thee."
"Glory!" all shouted (such the sounds mine ear
Gather'd from those, who near me swell'd the sounds)
"Glory in the highest be to God." We stood
Immovably suspended, like to those,
The shepherds, who first heard in Bethlehem's field
That song: till ceas'd the trembling, and the song
Was ended: then our hallow'd path resum'd,
Eying the prostrate shadows, who renew'd
Their custom'd mourning. Never in my breast
Did ignorance so struggle with desire
Of knowledge, if my memory do not err,
As in that moment; nor through haste dar'd I
To question, nor myself could aught discern,
So on I far'd in thoughtfulness and dread.

CANTO XXI

The natural thirst, ne'er quench'd but from the well,
Whereof the woman of Samaria crav'd,
Excited: haste along the cumber'd path,
After my guide, impell'd; and pity mov'd
My bosom for the 'vengeful deed, though just.
When lo! even as Luke relates, that Christ
Appear'd unto the two upon their way,
New-risen from his vaulted grave; to us
A shade appear'd, and after us approach'd,
Contemplating the crowd beneath its feet.
We were not ware of it; so first it spake,
Saying, "God give you peace, my brethren!" then
Sudden we turn'd: and Virgil such salute,
As fitted that kind greeting, gave, and cried:
"Peace in the blessed council be thy lot
Awarded by that righteous court, which me
To everlasting banishment exiles!"

"How!" he exclaim'd, nor from his speed meanwhile
Desisting, "If that ye be spirits, whom God
Vouchsafes not room above, who up the height
Has been thus far your guide?" To whom the bard:
"If thou observe the tokens, which this man
Trac'd by the finger of the angel bears,
'Tis plain that in the kingdom of the just
He needs must share. But sithence she, whose wheel
Spins day and night, for him not yet had drawn

That yarn, which, on the fatal distaff pil'd,
Clotho apportions to each wight that breathes,
His soul, that sister is to mine and thine,
Not of herself could mount, for not like ours
Her ken: whence I, from forth the ample gulf
Of hell was ta'en, to lead him, and will lead
Far as my lore avails. But, if thou know,
Instruct us for what cause, the mount erewhile
Thus shook and trembled: wherefore all at once
Seem'd shouting, even from his wave-wash'd foot."

That questioning so tallied with my wish,
The thirst did feel abatement of its edge
E'en from expectance. He forthwith replied,
"In its devotion nought irregular
This mount can witness, or by punctual rule
Unsanction'd; here from every change exempt.
Other than that, which heaven in itself
Doth of itself receive, no influence
Can reach us. Tempest none, shower, hail or snow,
Hoar frost or dewy moistness, higher falls
Than that brief scale of threefold steps: thick clouds
Nor scudding rack are ever seen: swift glance
Ne'er lightens, nor Thaumantian Iris gleams,
That yonder often shift on each side heav'n.
Vapour adust doth never mount above
The highest of the trinal stairs, whereon
Peter's vicegerent stands. Lower perchance,
With various motion rock'd, trembles the soil:
But here, through wind in earth's deep hollow pent,
I know not how, yet never trembled: then
Trembles, when any spirit feels itself
So purified, that it may rise, or move
For rising, and such loud acclaim ensues.
Purification by the will alone
Is prov'd, that free to change society
Seizes the soul rejoicing in her will.
Desire of bliss is present from the first;
But strong propension hinders, to that wish
By the just ordinance of heav'n oppos'd;
Propension now as eager to fulfil
Th' allotted torment, as erewhile to sin.
And I who in this punishment had lain
Five hundred years and more, but now have felt
Free wish for happier clime. Therefore thou felt'st
The mountain tremble, and the spirits devout
Heard'st, over all his limits, utter praise
To that liege Lord, whom I entreat their joy
To hasten." Thus he spake: and since the draught
Is grateful ever as the thirst is keen,
No words may speak my fullness of content.

"Now," said the instructor sage, "I see the net
That takes ye here, and how the toils are loos'd,
Why rocks the mountain and why ye rejoice.
Vouchsafe, that from thy lips I next may learn,
Who on the earth thou wast, and wherefore here
So many an age wert prostrate."--"In that time,
When the good Titus, with Heav'n's King to help,

Aveng'd those piteous gashes, whence the blood
By Judas sold did issue, with the name
Most lasting and most honour'd there was I
Abundantly renown'd," the shade reply'd,
"Not yet with faith endued. So passing sweet
My vocal Spirit, from Tolosa, Rome
To herself drew me, where I merited
A myrtle garland to inwreath my brow.
Staius they name me still. Of Thebes I sang,
And next of great Achilles: but i' th' way
Fell with the second burthen. Of my flame
Those sparkles were the seeds, which I deriv'd
From the bright fountain of celestial fire
That feeds unnumber'd lamps, the song I mean
Which sounds Aeneas' wand'rings: that the breast
I hung at, that the nurse, from whom my veins
Drank inspiration: whose authority
Was ever sacred with me. To have liv'd
Coeval with the Mantuan, I would bide
The revolution of another sun
Beyond my stated years in banishment."

The Mantuan, when he heard him, turn'd to me,
And holding silence: by his countenance
Enjoin'd me silence but the power which wills,
Bears not supreme control: laughter and tears
Follow so closely on the passion prompts them,
They wait not for the motions of the will
In natures most sincere. I did but smile,
As one who winks; and thereupon the shade
Broke off, and peer'd into mine eyes, where best
Our looks interpret. "So to good event
Mayst thou conduct such great emprise," he cried,
"Say, why across thy visage beam'd, but now,
The lightning of a smile!" On either part
Now am I straiten'd; one conjures me speak,
Th' other to silence binds me: whence a sigh
I utter, and the sigh is heard. "Speak on;"
The teacher cried; "and do not fear to speak,
But tell him what so earnestly he asks."
Whereon I thus: "Perchance, O ancient spirit!
Thou marvel'st at my smiling. There is room
For yet more wonder. He who guides my ken
On high, he is that Mantuan, led by whom
Thou didst presume of men and gods to sing.
If other cause thou deem'dst for which I smil'd,
Leave it as not the true one; and believe
Those words, thou spak'st of him, indeed the cause."

Now down he bent t' embrace my teacher's feet;
But he forbade him: "Brother! do it not:
Thou art a shadow, and behold'st a shade."
He rising answer'd thus: "Now hast thou prov'd
The force and ardour of the love I bear thee,
When I forget we are but things of air,
And as a substance treat an empty shade."

CANTO XXII

Now we had left the angel, who had turn'd
To the sixth circle our ascending step,
One gash from off my forehead raz'd: while they,
Whose wishes tend to justice, shouted forth:
"Blessed!" and ended with, "I thirst:" and I,
More nimble than along the other straits,
So journey'd, that, without the sense of toil,
I follow'd upward the swift-footed shades;
When Virgil thus began: "Let its pure flame
From virtue flow, and love can never fail
To warm another's bosom' so the light
Shine manifestly forth. Hence from that hour,
When 'mongst us in the purlieu of the deep,
Came down the spirit of Aquinum's hard,
Who told of thine affection, my good will
Hath been for thee of quality as strong
As ever link'd itself to one not seen.
Therefore these stairs will now seem short to me.
But tell me: and if too secure I loose
The rein with a friend's license, as a friend
Forgive me, and speak now as with a friend:
How chanc'd it covetous desire could find
Place in that bosom, 'midst such ample store
Of wisdom, as thy zeal had treasur'd there?"

First somewhat mov'd to laughter by his words,
Staius replied: "Each syllable of thine
Is a dear pledge of love. Things oft appear
That minister false matters to our doubts,
When their true causes are remov'd from sight.
Thy question doth assure me, thou believ'st
I was on earth a covetous man, perhaps
Because thou found'st me in that circle plac'd.
Know then I was too wide of avarice:
And e'en for that excess, thousands of moons
Have wax'd and wan'd upon my sufferings.
And were it not that I with heedful care
Noted where thou exclaim'st as if in ire
With human nature, 'Why, thou cursed thirst
Of gold! dost not with juster measure guide
The appetite of mortals?' I had met
The fierce encounter of the voluble rock.
Then was I ware that with too ample wing
The hands may haste to lavishment, and turn'd,
As from my other evil, so from this
In penitence. How many from their grave
Shall with shorn locks arise, who living, aye
And at life's last extreme, of this offence,
Through ignorance, did not repent. And know,
The fault which lies direct from any sin
In level opposition, here With that
Wastes its green rankness on one common heap.
Therefore if I have been with those, who wail
Their avarice, to cleanse me, through reverse
Of their transgression, such hath been my lot."

To whom the sovran of the pastoral song:
"While thou didst sing that cruel warfare wag'd
By the twin sorrow of Jocasta's womb,
From thy discourse with Clio there, it seems
As faith had not been shine: without the which
Good deeds suffice not. And if so, what sun
Rose on thee, or what candle pierc'd the dark
That thou didst after see to hoist the sail,
And follow, where the fisherman had led?"

He answering thus: "By thee conducted first,
I enter'd the Parnassian grotts, and quaff'd
Of the clear spring; illumin'd first by thee
Open'd mine eyes to God. Thou didst, as one,
Who, journeying through the darkness, hears a light
Behind, that profits not himself, but makes
His followers wise, when thou exclaimedst, 'Lo!
A renovat'd world! Justice return'd!
Times of primeval innocence restor'd!
And a new race descended from above!
Poet and Christian both to thee I owed.
That thou mayst mark more clearly what I trace,
My hand shall stretch forth to inform the lines
With livelier colouring. Soon o'er all the world,
By messengers from heav'n, the true belief
Teem'd now prolific, and that word of thine
Accordant, to the new instructors chim'd.
Induc'd by which agreement, I was wont
Resort to them; and soon their sanctity
So won upon me, that, Domitian's rage
Pursuing them, I mix'd my tears with theirs,
And, while on earth I stay'd, still succour'd them;
And their most righteous customs made me scorn
All sects besides. Before I led the Greeks
In tuneful fiction, to the streams of Thebes,
I was baptiz'd; but secretly, through fear,
Remain'd a Christian, and conform'd long time
To Pagan rites. Five centuries and more,
T for that lukewarmness was fain to pace
Round the fourth circle. Thou then, who hast rais'd
The covering, which did hide such blessing from me,
Whilst much of this ascent is yet to climb,
Say, if thou know, where our old Terence bides,
Caecilius, Plautus, Varro: if condemn'd
They dwell, and in what province of the deep."
"These," said my guide, "with Persius and myself,
And others many more, are with that Greek,
Of mortals, the most cherish'd by the Nine,
In the first ward of darkness. There ofttimes
We of that mount hold converse, on whose top
For aye our nurses live. We have the bard
Of Pella, and the Teian, Agatho,
Simonides, and many a Grecian else
Ingarlanded with laurel. Of thy train
Antigone is there, Deiphile,
Argia, and as sorrowful as erst
Ismene, and who show'd Langia's wave:
Deidamia with her sisters there,
And blind Tiresias' daughter, and the bride

Sea-born of Peleus." Either poet now
Was silent, and no longer by th' ascent
Or the steep walls obstructed, round them cast
Inquiring eyes. Four handmaids of the day
Had finish'd now their office, and the fifth
Was at the chariot-beam, directing still
Its balmy point aloof, when thus my guide:
"Methinks, it well behooves us to the brink
Bend the right shoulder' circuiting the mount,
As we have ever us'd." So custom there
Was usher to the road, the which we chose
Less doubtful, as that worthy shade complied.

They on before me went; I sole pursued,
List'ning their speech, that to my thoughts convey'd
Mysterious lessons of sweet poesy.
But soon they ceas'd; for midway of the road
A tree we found, with goodly fruitage hung,
And pleasant to the smell: and as a fir
Upward from bough to bough less ample spreads,
So downward this less ample spread, that none.
Methinks, aloft may climb. Upon the side,
That clos'd our path, a liquid crystal fell
From the steep rock, and through the sprays above
Stream'd showering. With associate step the bards
Drew near the plant; and from amidst the leaves
A voice was heard: "Ye shall be chary of me;"
And after added: "Mary took more thought
For joy and honour of the nuptial feast,
Than for herself who answers now for you.
The women of old Rome were satisfied
With water for their beverage. Daniel fed
On pulse, and wisdom gain'd. The primal age
Was beautiful as gold; and hunger then
Made acorns tasteful, thirst each rivulet
Run nectar. Honey and locusts were the food,
Whereon the Baptist in the wilderness
Fed, and that eminence of glory reach'd
And greatness, which the' Evangelist records."

CANTO XXIII

On the green leaf mine eyes were fix'd, like his
Who throws away his days in idle chase
Of the diminutive, when thus I heard
The more than father warn me: "Son! our time
Asks thriftier using. Linger not: away."

Thereat my face and steps at once I turn'd
Toward the sages, by whose converse cheer'd
I journey'd on, and felt no toil: and lo!
A sound of weeping and a song: "My lips,
O Lord!" and these so mingled, it gave birth
To pleasure and to pain. "O Sire, belov'd!
Say what is this I hear?" Thus I inquir'd.

"Spirits," said he, "who as they go, perchance,
Their debt of duty pay." As on their road
The thoughtful pilgrims, overtaking some
Not known unto them, turn to them, and look,
But stay not; thus, approaching from behind
With speedier motion, eyed us, as they pass'd,
A crowd of spirits, silent and devout.
The eyes of each were dark and hollow: pale
Their visage, and so lean withal, the bones
Stood staring thro' the skin. I do not think
Thus dry and meagre Erisichon show'd,
When pinc'd by sharp-set famine to the quick.

"Lo!" to myself I mus'd, "the race, who lost
Jerusalem, when Mary with dire beak
Prey'd on her child." The sockets seem'd as rings,
From which the gems were drops. Who reads the name
Of man upon his forehead, there the M
Had trac'd most plainly. Who would deem, that scent
Of water and an apple, could have prov'd
Powerful to generate such pining want,
Not knowing how it wrought? While now I stood
Wond'ring what thus could waste them (for the cause
Of their gaunt hollowness and scaly rind
Appear'd not) lo! a spirit turn'd his eyes
In their deep-sunken cell, and fasten'd then
On me, then cried with vehemence aloud:
"What grace is this vouchsaf'd me?" By his looks
I ne'er had recogniz'd him: but the voice
Brought to my knowledge what his cheer conceal'd.
Remembrance of his alter'd lineaments
Was kindled from that spark; and I agniz'd
The visage of Forese. "Ah! respect
This wan and leprous wither'd skin," thus he
Suppliant implor'd, "this macerated flesh.
Speak to me truly of thyself. And who
Are those twain spirits, that escort thee there?
Be it not said thou Scorn'st to talk with me."

"That face of thine," I answer'd him, "which dead
I once bewail'd, disposes me not less
For weeping, when I see It thus transform'd.
Say then, by Heav'n, what blasts ye thus? The whilst
I wonder, ask not Speech from me: unapt
Is he to speak, whom other will employs."

He thus: "The water and tee plant we pass'd,
Virtue possesses, by th' eternal will
Infus'd, the which so pines me. Every spirit,
Whose song bewails his gluttony indulg'd
Too grossly, here in hunger and in thirst
Is purified. The odour, which the fruit,
And spray, that showers upon the verdure, breathe,
Inflames us with desire to feed and drink.
Nor once alone encompassing our route
We come to add fresh fuel to the pain:
Pain, said lolace rather: for that will
To the tree leads us, by which Christ was led
To call Elias, joyful when he paid

Our ransom from his vein." I answering thus:
"Forese! from that day, in which the world
For better life thou changedst, not five years
Have circled. If the power of sinning more
Were first concluded in thee, ere thou knew'st
That kindly grief, which re-espouses us
To God, how hither art thou come so soon?
I thought to find thee lower, there, where time
Is recompense for time." He straight replied:
"To drink up the sweet wormwood of affliction
I have been brought thus early by the tears
Stream'd down my Nella's cheeks. Her prayers devout,
Her sighs have drawn me from the coast, where oft
Expectance lingers, and have set me free
From th' other circles. In the sight of God
So much the dearer is my widow priz'd,
She whom I lov'd so fondly, as she ranks
More singly eminent for virtuous deeds.
The tract most barb'rous of Sardinia's isle,
Hath dames more chaste and modester by far
Than that wherein I left her. O sweet brother!
What wouldst thou have me say? A time to come
Stands full within my view, to which this hour
Shall not be counted of an ancient date,
When from the pulpit shall be loudly warn'd
Th' unblushing dames of Florence, lest they bare
Unkerchief'd bosoms to the common gaze.
What savage women hath the world e'er seen,
What Saracens, for whom there needed scourge
Of spiritual or other discipline,
To force them walk with cov'ring on their limbs!
But did they see, the shameless ones, that Heav'n
Wafts on swift wing toward them, while I speak,
Their mouths were op'd for howling: they shall taste
Of Borrow (unless foresight cheat me here)
Or ere the cheek of him be cloth'd with down
Who is now rock'd with lullaby asleep.
Ah! now, my brother, hide thyself no more,
Thou seest how not I alone but all
Gaze, where thou veil'st the intercepted sun."

Whence I replied: "If thou recall to mind
What we were once together, even yet
Remembrance of those days may grieve thee sore.
That I forsook that life, was due to him
Who there precedes me, some few evenings past,
When she was round, who shines with sister lamp
To his, that glisters yonder," and I show'd
The sun. "Tis he, who through profoundest night
Of he true dead has brought me, with this flesh
As true, that follows. From that gloom the aid
Of his sure comfort drew me on to climb,
And climbing wind along this mountain-steep,
Which rectifies in you whate'er the world
Made crooked and deprav'd I have his word,
That he will bear me company as far
As till I come where Beatrice dwells:
But there must leave me. Virgil is that spirit,
Who thus hath promis'd," and I pointed to him;

"The other is that shade, for whom so late
Your realm, as he arose, exulting shook
Through every pendent cliff and rocky bound."

CANTO XXIV

Our journey was not slacken'd by our talk,
Nor yet our talk by journeying. Still we spake,
And urg'd our travel stoutly, like a ship
When the wind sits astern. The shadowy forms,

That seem'd things dead and dead again, drew in
At their deep-delved orbs rare wonder of me,
Perceiving I had life; and I my words
Continued, and thus spake; "He journeys up
Perhaps more tardily than else he would,
For others' sake. But tell me, if thou know'st,
Where is Piccarda? Tell me, if I see
Any of mark, among this multitude,
Who eye me thus."--"My sister (she for whom,
'Twixt beautiful and good I cannot say
Which name was fitter) wears e'en now her crown,
And triumphs in Olympus." Saying this,
He added: "Since spare diet hath so worn
Our semblance out, 't is lawful here to name
Each one. This," and his finger then he rais'd,
"Is Buonaggiuna,--Buonaggiuna, he
Of Lucca: and that face beyond him, pierc'd
Unto a leaner fineness than the rest,
Had keeping of the church: he was of Tours,
And purges by wan abstinence away
Bolsena's eels and cups of muscadel."

He show'd me many others, one by one,
And all, as they were nam'd, seem'd well content;
For no dark gesture I discern'd in any.
I saw through hunger Ubaldino grind
His teeth on emptiness; and Boniface,
That wav'd the crozier o'er a num'rous flock.
I saw the Marquis, who tad time erewhile
To swill at Forli with less drought, yet so
Was one ne'er sated. I howe'er, like him,
That gazing 'midst a crowd, singles out one,
So singled him of Lucca; for methought
Was none amongst them took such note of me.
Somewhat I heard him whisper of Gentucca:
The sound was indistinct, and murmur'd there,
Where justice, that so strips them, fix'd her sting.

"Spirit!" said I, "it seems as thou wouldst fain
Speak with me. Let me hear thee. Mutual wish
To converse prompts, which let us both indulge."

He, answ'ring, straight began: "Woman is born,
Whose brow no wimple shades yet, that shall make
My city please thee, blame it as they may.

Go then with this forewarning. If aught false
My whisper too implied, th' event shall tell
But say, if of a truth I see the man
Of that new lay th' inventor, which begins
With 'Ladies, ye that con the lore of love'."

To whom I thus: "Count of me but as one
Who am the scribe of love; that, when he breathes,
Take up my pen, and, as he dictates, write."

"Brother!" said he, "the hind'rance which once held
The notary with Guittone and myself,
Short of that new and sweeter style I hear,
Is now disclos'd. I see how ye your plumes
Stretch, as th' inditer guides them; which, no question,
Ours did not. He that seeks a grace beyond,
Sees not the distance parts one style from other."
And, as contented, here he held his peace.

Like as the bird, that winter near the Nile,
In squared regiment direct their course,
Then stretch themselves in file for speedier flight;
Thus all the tribe of spirits, as they turn'd
Their visage, faster deaf, nimble alike
Through leanness and desire. And as a man,
Tir'd With the motion of a trotting steed,
Slacks pace, and stays behind his company,
Till his o'erbreathed lungs keep temperate time;
E'en so Forese let that holy crew
Proceed, behind them lingering at my side,
And saying: "When shall I again behold thee?"

"How long my life may last," said I, "I know not;
This know, how soon soever I return,
My wishes will before me have arriv'd.
Sithence the place, where I am set to live,
Is, day by day, more scoop'd of all its good,
And dismal ruin seems to threaten it."

"Go now," he cried: "lo! he, whose guilt is most,
Passes before my vision, dragg'd at heels
Of an infuriate beast. Toward the vale,
Where guilt hath no redemption, on it speeds,
Each step increasing swiftness on the last;
Until a blow it strikes, that leaveth him
A corse most vilely shatter'd. No long space
Those wheels have yet to roll" (therewith his eyes
Look'd up to heav'n) "ere thou shalt plainly see
That which my words may not more plainly tell.
I quit thee: time is precious here: I lose
Too much, thus measuring my pace with shine."

As from a troop of well-rank'd chivalry
One knight, more enterprising than the rest,
Pricks forth at gallop, eager to display
His prowess in the first encounter prov'd
So parted he from us with lengthen'd strides,
And left me on the way with those twain spirits,
Who were such mighty marshals of the world.

When he beyond us had so fled mine eyes
No nearer reach'd him, than my thought his words,
The branches of another fruit, thick hung,
And blooming fresh, appear'd. E'en as our steps
Turn'd thither, not far off it rose to view.
Beneath it were a multitude, that rais'd
Their hands, and shouted forth I know not What
Unto the boughs; like greedy and fond brats,
That beg, and answer none obtain from him,
Of whom they beg; but more to draw them on,
He at arm's length the object of their wish
Above them holds aloft, and hides it not.

At length, as undeceiv'd they went their way:
And we approach the tree, who vows and tears
Sue to in vain, the mighty tree. "Pass on,
And come not near. Stands higher up the wood,
Whereof Eve tasted, and from it was ta'en
'this plant." Such sounds from midst the thickets came.
Whence I, with either bard, close to the side
That rose, pass'd forth beyond. "Remember," next
We heard, "those noblest creatures of the clouds,
How they their twofold bosoms overgorg'd
Oppos'd in fight to Theseus: call to mind
The Hebrews, how effeminate they stoop'd
To ease their thirst; whence Gideon's ranks were thinn'd,
As he to Midian march'd adown the hills."

Thus near one border coasting, still we heard
The sins of gluttony, with woe erewhile
Reguerdon'd. Then along the lonely path,
Once more at large, full thousand paces on
We travel'd, each contemplative and mute.

"Why pensive journey thus ye three alone?"
Thus suddenly a voice exclaim'd: whereat
I shook, as doth a scar'd and paltry beast;
Then rais'd my head to look from whence it came.

Was ne'er, in furnace, glass, or metal seen
So bright and glowing red, as was the shape
I now beheld. "If ye desire to mount,"
He cried, "here must ye turn. This way he goes,
Who goes in quest of peace." His countenance
Had dazzled me; and to my guides I fac'd
Backward, like one who walks, as sound directs.

As when, to harbinger the dawn, springs up
On freshen'd wing the air of May, and breathes
Of fragrance, all impregn'd with herb and flowers,
E'en such a wind I felt upon my front
Blow gently, and the moving of a wing
Perceiv'd, that moving shed ambrosial smell;
And then a voice: "Blessed are they, whom grace
Doth so illumine, that appetite in them
Exhaleth no inordinate desire,
Still hung'ring as the rule of temperance wills."

CANTO XXV

It was an hour, when he who climbs, had need
To walk uncrippled: for the sun had now
To Taurus the meridian circle left,
And to the Scorpion left the night. As one
That makes no pause, but presses on his road,
Whate'er betide him, if some urgent need
Impel: so enter'd we upon our way,
One before other; for, but singly, none
That steep and narrow scale admits to climb.

E'en as the young stork lifteth up his wing
Through wish to fly, yet ventures not to quit
The nest, and drops it; so in me desire
Of questioning my guide arose, and fell,
Arriving even to the act, that marks
A man prepar'd for speech. Him all our haste
Restrain'd not, but thus spake the sire belov'd:
Fear not to speed the shaft, that on thy lip
Stands trembling for its flight. Encourag'd thus
I straight began: "How there can leanness come,
Where is no want of nourishment to feed?"

"If thou," he answer'd, "hadst remember'd thee,
How Meleager with the wasting brand
Wasted alike, by equal fires consum'd,
This would not trouble thee: and hadst thou thought,
How in the mirror your reflected form
With mimic motion vibrates, what now seems
Hard, had appear'd no harder than the pulp
Of summer fruit mature. But that thy will
In certainty may find its full repose,
Lo Staius here! on him I call, and pray
That he would now be healer of thy wound."

"If in thy presence I unfold to him
The secrets of heaven's vengeance, let me plead
Thine own injunction, to exculpate me."
So Staius answer'd, and forthwith began:
"Attend my words, O son, and in thy mind
Receive them: so shall they be light to clear
The doubt thou offer'st. Blood, concocted well,
Which by the thirsty veins is ne'er imbib'd,
And rests as food superfluous, to be ta'en
From the replenish'd table, in the heart
Derives effectual virtue, that informs
The several human limbs, as being that,
Which passes through the veins itself to make them.
Yet more concocted it descends, where shame
Forbids to mention: and from thence distils
In natural vessel on another's blood.
Then each unite together, one dispos'd
T' endure, to act the other, through meet frame
Of its recipient mould: that being reach'd,
It 'gins to work, coagulating first;

Then vivifies what its own substance caus'd
To bear. With animation now indued,
The active virtue (differing from a plant
No further, than that this is on the way
And at its limit that) continues yet
To operate, that now it moves, and feels,
As sea sponge clinging to the rock: and there
Assumes th' organic powers its seed convey'd.
'This is the period, son! at which the virtue,
That from the generating heart proceeds,
Is pliant and expansive; for each limb
Is in the heart by forgeful nature plann'd.
How babe of animal becomes, remains
For thy consid'ring. At this point, more wise,
Than thou hast err'd, making the soul disjoin'd
From passive intellect, because he saw
No organ for the latter's use assign'd.

"Open thy bosom to the truth that comes.
Know soon as in the embryo, to the brain,
Articulation is complete, then turns
The primal Mover with a smile of joy
On such great work of nature, and imbreathes
New spirit replete with virtue, that what here
Active it finds, to its own substance draws,
And forms an individual soul, that lives,
And feels, and bends reflective on itself.
And that thou less mayst marvel at the word,
Mark the sun's heat, how that to wine doth change,
Mix'd with the moisture filter'd through the vine.

"When Lachesis hath spun the thread, the soul
Takes with her both the human and divine,
Memory, intelligence, and will, in act
Far keener than before, the other powers
Inactive all and mute. No pause allow'd,
In wond'rous sort self-moving, to one strand
Of those, where the departed roam, she falls,
Here learns her destin'd path. Soon as the place
Receives her, round the plastic virtue beams,
Distinct as in the living limbs before:
And as the air, when saturate with showers,
The casual beam refracting, decks itself
With many a hue; so here the ambient air
Weareth that form, which influence of the soul
Imprints on it; and like the flame, that where
The fire moves, thither follows, so henceforth
The new form on the spirit follows still:
Hence hath it semblance, and is shadow call'd,
With each sense even to the sight endued:
Hence speech is ours, hence laughter, tears, and sighs
Which thou mayst oft have witness'd on the mount
Th' obedient shadow fails not to present
Whatever varying passion moves within us.
And this the cause of what thou marvel'st at."

Now the last flexure of our way we reach'd,
And to the right hand turning, other care
Awaits us. Here the rocky precipice

Hurls forth redundant flames, and from the rim
A blast upblown, with forcible rebuff
Driveth them back, sequester'd from its bound.

Behoov'd us, one by one, along the side,
That border'd on the void, to pass; and I
Fear'd on one hand the fire, on th' other fear'd
Headlong to fall: when thus th' instructor warn'd:
"Strict rein must in this place direct the eyes.
A little swerving and the way is lost."

Then from the bosom of the burning mass,
"O God of mercy!" heard I sung; and felt
No less desire to turn. And when I saw
Spirits along the flame proceeding, I
Between their footsteps and mine own was fain
To share by turns my view. At the hymn's close
They shouted loud, "I do not know a man;"
Then in low voice again took up the strain,
Which once more ended, "To the wood," they cried,
"Ran Dian, and drave forth Callisto, stung
With Cytherea's poison:" then return'd
Unto their song; then marry a pair extoll'd,
Who liv'd in virtue chastely, and the bands
Of wedded love. Nor from that task, I ween,
Surcease they; whilesoe'er the scorching fire
Enclasps them. Of such skill appliance needs
To medicine the wound, that healeth last.

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